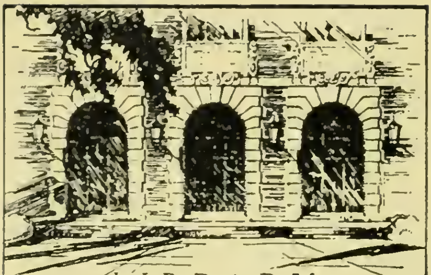


THE GREEN BAY TREE

VOL. III

Difficile est

Satiram non scribere.

The Green Bay Tree

A tale of to-day

by

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·AND

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE WANING HONEYMOON	1
II.	THE HOUSE OF RIMMON	16
III.	THE PLUCKING OF THE PIGEON	36
IV.	THE SERPENT IN THE EDEN	54
V.	FLIGHT	80
VI.	THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS	103
VII.	THE SPROUTING OF THE BAY TREE	127
VIII.	WEST SOUTHWARK	141
IX.	GRUB-STREET, W.C.	157
X.	THE CROWN OF BAY-LEAVES	189
XI.	THE SORROWS OF SANCTITY	220
XII.	THE WOOD OF ST. JOHN	240
XIII.	THE LAST STAGE	266
	L'ENVOI	284

PREFATORY NOTE

Chapters IV, V, VI, VII, XI, XII, XIII and L'Envoi in this volume are written by Mr. W. H. Wilkins.

Chapters I, II, III, VIII, IX and X, are written by Mr. Herbert Vivian.

THE GREEN BAY TREE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WANING HONEYMOON.

> The reason why so few marriages are happy is because young ladies spend their time in making nets, not in making cages.
> —Dean Swift.

Cannes is an inconvenient place for those who want to play at Monte Carlo. It is a long day's excursion, involving a barbarously early breakfast and a return in the small hours of the next morning, if you mean to play seriously. Most of the fast people at Cannes resign themselves to this and either make rare expeditions, whenever the gambling fever comes over them, or devote a few days to it once or twice during the winter. For

the rest, baccarat at the Cercle Nautique and poker-parties in the hotels and villas generally suffice, and you hear disdainful remarks about the 'dreadful rabble' at the tables and about the discomforts of the hotels at Monte Carlo. Most of our friends, however, flitted to and fro between the two places, coming to Cannes for their society and returning to Monte Carlo for their dissipation.

A great yearning had come over Tyrconnel for dissipation. He had now been 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' within the strait-waistcoat of virtue for quite a long time and was heartily sick of it. Getting back among his old companions in revelry awoke all the old longings in him. Gwendolen had sufficiently disciplined him to keep the passionate side of his nature well under control, but the irresistible craving for excitement, which had always been one of his most ingrained characteristics, was now rapidly getting the better of him. Every day he became more morose and

unbearable. Any allusion to Monte Carlo made him irritable and yet he could not be five minutes with one of his old boon companions without leading the conversation round to it, and his eyes would glisten as Wilmot narrated extraordinary runs at trente-et-quarante or Williams enlarged upon the fabulous gains made by a syndicate of young men who had come out with a capital of £100 to play the Labouchere system.

Coryton tried to persuade Tyrconnel to come over for the day, but he said Gwendolen would not hear of it and hastily added, on detecting a smile on his friend's Mephistophelian countenance, that besides he had no wish to do so. Meanwhile his rickety appearance was getting more and more confirmed, and he would give vent to outbursts of temper at the least provocation, outbursts which often terminated in an ugly cough.

Last of all Gwendolen noticed it.

"You are not looking well, dear Wilfrid," she

said one morning with a slight quiver of anxiety in her voice. "I wonder whether this place suits you."

They were standing on their balcony after breakfast. She was feasting her eyes on the intense joyousness of nature, the deep, deep blue of sea and sky, the sparkle of the sunshine in the fountain beneath their windows and the soothing solemnity of the stately palms hard by. The Riviera reminded her more and more each day of Bible lands, as it has done many another who has searched the Scriptures. Her husband's illness had been dawning upon her for some time, but it never formed itself as a reality to her mind before now, and even now it did not do so as a serious one. She was looking out towards the Esterels and deducing from the aspect of the wooded hills in the foreground the truth of the comparison of the man in the gospel who began by seeing 'men as trees walking,' when his sight was restored to

him. Those trees resembled men in the dim distance. Presently she relapsed into a former train of thought and looked at the young man again and reproached herself—without any thought of bitterness—that she had thought so much of the welfare of his soul, so little of that of his body.

He too was straining his eyes out over the horizon, but it was towards Golfe-Juan, where the Corsican landed, and Antibes, whose obtruding promontory angered him, for, like Gwen, it divided him from the gay principality, whither his mental vision now struggled to force the physical. At last he said with a hoarse voice in an abrupt manner that was meant to be determined,

"I think I shall run over to Monte Carlo for the day. Let me see," he went on, pulling out his watch, "if I put on my boots now, I shall just have time to catch the 9.45 train. I suppose it's no use asking you to come? Well, I daresay you

won't be sorry to get rid of me for one day after such a dose of me all these weeks!"

The last sentence was said with an attempt at playfulness, which proved a signal failure.

Gwendolen heard him out with an ominous silence, biting her lip and looking at him with large glistening eyes like those of a sorrowing guardian-angel. A torrent of expostulation was twice on the point of overflowing from her lips, but she checked it with an effort and then, with forced calmness, she said slowly,

"You could not go to-day, Wilfrid. We have promised Madame Lepeigne to go for a picnic to the islands."

"Bother!" he conceded ungraciously. Then he added with a very obstinate look in his face, "well, I shall go to-morrow."

"To-morrow," echoed his wife with a half malicious feeling of triumph at the fresh unanswerable obstacle, "to-morrow will be *Sunday*."

Tyrconnel made a gesture of annoyance and said, "Well, Monday then," as he turned abruptly back into the sitting-room, striking his head sharply against the window as he did so.

Nothing more was said about Monte Carlo until Sunday night, when Gwendolen broached the subject again after dinner. The moment was not well chosen, for Tyrconnel had been worried into two attendances at church, with the result that he was now irritable and rebellious. The least thing seemed to tire him now. Moreover, the sermon that morning, by the diminutive Bishop of Bedlam, had been devoted to denunciations of the 'House of Rimmon,' and the eternal fallacies about suicides, the grotesque assertion that the concerts and the gardens at Monte Carlo are the 'price of blood,' with all the other extravagances of a narrow and ill-balanced mind, had outraged his sense of fairness.

They were in their private sitting-room. It was a chilly evening and a fire had been lighted,

but it burned badly. The lamp had been carefully trimmed and added an artificial gloom to that which already existed in their minds.

Each had an expression of being profoundly bored. Tyrconnel sat in a fold-up chair affecting to read 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World,' which Gwendolen, who had views about 'Sunday-books,' had forced on him. He found it difficult to keep his attention to it and indeed scarcely cared to try, for the type was blurred by the dim light and the subject had not the faintest interest for him.

Meanwhile Gwendolen sat on the other side of the fire-place turning over somewhat idly a large parcel of tracts, recently sent her by Miss Tyrconnel. The waning of the honeymoon had not destroyed in her the minute interest in the smallest movements of her husband, which devoted brides sometimes touchingly display. She kept watching him with an expression, which it would have

puzzled a stranger to explain. It contained solicitude for his health and a kind of guardian-angel tenderness, which suited her style of beauty; but there was also a marked shade of annoyance at his lack of interest in her book and, as the yawns succeeded each other like minute-guns, a frown began to form itself on her broad calm brow.

"If you're tired, you'd better go to bed," she said at last, with unusual impatience, in the tone of a mother lecturing a troublesome child.

It was the fifth long-drawn yawn in five minutes and he had slowly pulled out his hunter-watch, looked at it and shut it up with an ostentatious click three times during the same period.

"My dear, it's only half-past eight. I really couldn't go to bed with the hens like that. Not even to oblige you," he added with a touch of mockery in his voice; "I think I shall go down to the billiard-room for a cigar."

"I have got something to say to you first,"

she returned, in tones which only served to increase his irritation.

"Well!" he asked with an ostentatious lack of interest.

"You are not going to Monte Carlo to-morrow."

She had tried to impart a pleading, or at least an interrogative accent to the sentence, but it sounded to Tyrconnel more like a menace. There was a sulky silence of about two minutes.

"Are you?" she added pleadingly, as he showed no sign of making answer.

"You seem to have settled it for me," he replied with some bitterness.

"That is good of you, Wilfrid," she said more softly, taking this for acquiescence and laying a hand affectionately on his.

He rose to his feet without responding to the caress, and said emphatically,

"Pray don't mistake me. I have made up my mind to go and I shall go. I need a change.

My health is suffering from the monotony of this place. You religious people are so selfish," he went on with rising anger. "I don't believe you care a snap whether I am ill or well, happy or miserable, so long as your bread-and-butter theories of life are observed. Pray, what do you know of the world outside your school-room door and your Cambridge lecture-halls? Who set you up to be a ruler and a judge? Where did you learn——"

The tirade ended in a fit of coughing. He rocked himself to and fro for some minutes and then sank back into his chair. But his words had probed her to the quick and she stood before him with hands clenched by her side and a strange light in her eyes, scarcely noticing his cough. When he had partly recovered, she returned to the charge.

"The world! No, indeed," she answered with a fine scorn. "I know little enough of it and I

care not to know. But I have at least learned—even in the small and humble sphere which you so despise—I have learned to distinguish between good and evil. And the love I bear you will, I pray to God, inspire me to protest, so long as I have breath, when I see you setting your face towards wrong-doing."

"I must be allowed to judge what is right and wrong for myself," he rejoined in a faint voice. "I am willing to do all I can to humour your whims and prejudices. I have denied myself pleasures and exposed myself to actual discomforts in order to do so, but there are limits to such sacrifices and you must not tax my good-nature too far."

She was about to reply when the discussion was interrupted by the entrance of the porter with a letter. Tyrconnel took it carelessly, examined the address with a slight show of curiosity, opened the envelope and began to read a little ill-scented, ill-

written note, then hastily crumpled it up and thrust it into his breast-pocket, his face gradually becoming crimson as much with anger as with embarrassment. Gwendolen watched him with more astonishment than alarm, but a certain qualm of uneasiness could not be altogether avoided and she stood before him, as if waiting for and confidently expecting an explanation.

As he offered none, she said, taking up the end of his last speech,

"Would it be 'taxing your good-nature' too far, to ask you whom that letter is from?"

"I can't tell you, Gwen," he faltered, suddenly taking a more conciliatory tone. "I must ask you to believe that it does not concern you in any way."

"What concerns you concerns me, Wilfrid."

"It does not concern my present life. No good purpose would be served by showing it to you. I will show you what store I set by it," and he stooped down to the fire, held the letter between the logs

until it caught the flame, and then gave it a vicious dig with the end of the bellows. The flicker of the fire gave his face, now very pale again, a strange and ghastly colour.

Nothing was said for some time. Then he bent over and kissed her forehead without a trace of sentiment.

"Good-night, Gwen," he said, "I have some letters to write and am going downstairs for a smoke. I daresay you will be asleep before I turn in."

"More letters!" she said, stroking her forehead upwards in a weary way, "and do they not concern our present life either? You used to have no secrets from me. I feel already as if we had been married years and years and years. You have begun to slight me and the joy is ebbing from my life. I did not dream that you would tire of me so soon."

"Don't be a goose, Gwen," he replied irritably, as he sauntered out of the room with his hands

deep in his pockets, slamming the door behind him.

Gwendolen remained for a long time leaning against the mantelpiece, thinking. She looked fixedly at the damp logs and her eyes filled with tears. Presently she drew herself up erect, as if to do battle with these sad thoughts. She crossed the room, found her Bible, and sat down on a stool to read the 14th chapter of Saint John, which had upon her the effect of a cordial on a fainting man.

There was a serene smile of trustful happiness on her countenance as she turned down the lamp and made her way to her bedroom.

"'Peace I leave with you,'" she murmured, "'my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.'"

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

'I want to see the wheels go wound.'
—HELEN'S BABIES.

"IT is a quarter to twelve; I must look sharp or I shall be late for business," exclaimed Harold Gaverigan, tossing his unfinished cigarette over the parapet and making an unusual display of alacrity.

"Nonsense, old chap," said Coryton, leaning back languidly on the big green reversible seat which he occupied on the terrace. "You can't coop yourself up in that filthy casino on a glorious day like this. Why not get hold of Lady Giddy and drive over

with Vixie and me to Nice for lunch at the London House."

"Oh! do, Mr. Gaverigan," added Mrs. Coryton, looking up with a bright smile from an elaborate pattern she was executing on the gravel with her parasol. "That would be jolly."

Gaverigan, ever susceptible to attentions from the fair sex, thereupon assumed a very sorrowful air, like the rich young man in the parable, for the casino was all-engrossing to him.

"I should have enjoyed it of all things," he said regretfully, "but for one thing, I always have lunch at eleven in the French fashion and, for another, I rather packed myself up yesterday, as they phrase it here, and I have fifty-four louis to recoup to-day. I am afraid I must run along now or I shan't get a seat at all and it always spells ruin to try to play standing."

"Very well," laughed Violet with a friendly nod, "we won't spoil your sport. I hope you will

win a pot of money to-day and be able to give yourself a holiday and drive with us to-morrow."

The terrace at Monte Carlo is a pleasant lounge at noon in winter. There are not enough people about to be exacting in the matter of dress; you can give yourself over to the full enjoyment of your surroundings. And such surroundings! Assuredly the world contains no other such favoured corner, where art and nature have so conspired to erect a paradise.

Coryton and his wife, experts in the science of extracting all possible enjoyment out of their surroundings, had been sitting there for about half an hour, looking the picture of content, basking in the sunshine and drawing in long breaths of ozone as the faintest of sea-breezes played upon their brows. And they looked no less prosperous than they did contented. There was not a trace of care of any sort upon their smooth, fresh young faces; they were dressed to convey an impression

of wealth—as all wise people with their own way to make in the world always must be—but what is a still greater triumph of astuteness, their clothes were made to aim rather at comfort than display.

Violet's dress was of fawn-coloured cloth, exquisitely fitting and distinguished by a thin trimming of choice sable; her head looked very knowing under a prettily twisted toque of violet velvet bordered with a couple of sable-tails. Coryton looked spick and span in a double breasted jacket of dark grey tweed with navy blue trousers and Oxford shoes. The usual Monte-Carlo hat of soft black felt was perched jauntily on the side of his head so as to display his curls.

They were very little changed since we saw them last, and certainly not for the worse. Violet had not lost her sprightliness, but had added to it some of the charms of maturity. She had always been good friends with her husband since

they were boy and girl, but it was only during the last few weeks that she had come to admit to herself that it was all very ridiculous, but really she was getting quite spoony about that dear Poley. Love is always the most permanent when it follows, instead of preceding marriage, and Coryton, who would have laughed aloud at the suggestion of his possibly giving way to any such weakness as love, was getting daily happier in the society of his wife and prouder of her good looks and cleverness.

They watched Gaverigan hurrying up the terrace-steps towards the casino, and Violet, half closing her eyes to enjoy the brightness of the colouring around her, remarked playfully upon the young man's unusual display of energy.

"Yes," returned Coryton, "he has fits of energy like that. If he only kept them up, he might accomplish wonders. You remember when he went down to Sheffield, utterly unknown there, and

started a candidature on lines of his own?"

"No. What happened?"

"He had meetings every night for a week and, after the first three, carried votes of confidence in his candidature. Then he calmly went away and never came near them from that day to this."

"It's a pity he gambles so much and so recklessly. He's certain to bring himself to grief one of these days."

"Yes, he should only gamble in the way we do, and never back anything except certainties. I have no patience with people who persist in backing uncertainties."

"Like that dear good Pigeon, for instance."

"Pouf! He plays like a lunatic. Gaverigan at any rate has some method in his madness. By the way, I wouldn't mind betting my boots we shall see Pidge over here before long, in spite of all his new-laid virtue and the terrorism of that Sainte Nitouche of a wife of his."

"I don't want your boots," she laughed, "but I'll bet you something nicer, say, a kiss or, better still, a new bonnet from the rue de la Paix, that if he does come it'll be without her. In fact, I shouldn't wonder if it meant a breach between them."

"Well," he said, lowering his voice, which was an unnecessary precaution as there was no one within shouting distance, "there most certainly will be a breach between them, unless Miss Sarah Popkins should happen to come in for a fortune in the course of the next few weeks."

"That dreadful Sally Popkins? I really think it's a mistake coming down to that kind of instrument."

Coryton looked into her eyes with an amused smile.

"I almost believe," he said incredulously, "that you—are—jealous!"

Violet pouted.

"And if I am, I don't see that that is—so very—ridiculous."

A cloud had gathered on her face as she finished the sentence. The smile slowly died away on his face and he looked vexed for a moment.

"Vixie, you mustn't be absurd. Have you such a poor opinion of me after all these years? Vi, I feel hurt. I really do. Could you so misjudge me as to think I have not control over myself in my dealings with such creatures, or that I would demean myself to touch them with the end of a barge-pole except to make them useful? Don't you know that I am a being entirely destitute of emotions or affections of any sort or kind—except of course for you, my dear?" he added, with a ceremonious bow.

"I am glad you made that reservation, how-beit reluctantly," she retorted, recovering her good humour rapidly. "But tell me what the scheme is. Sally is to blackmail Pidge by threatening

to tell the saintly Gwendolen. That's all very well for Sally, but where do you come in? You're not going to share the spoil with her, I suppose?"

"Hardly. The thing isn't yet quite thought out. Perhaps if she worries him judiciously, he may come to me for advice. Or perhaps again she may produce a breach between him and Gwendolen, as I was saying just now. In any case he gets back into my team again, and he was useful, you must admit."

"'M, yes. Useful in a way. But is it worth soiling your hands like that for such an object? Suppose it all came out."

"I shall take precautions. So far as I am concerned there will be nothing to come out. It won't need such a frightful amount of astuteness to accomplish that much. I have had dealings with these Samaritans before, you know."

"Yes, I know you have," she said drily; "and I wish you'd stop having dealings with them."

"I daresay you do. But, my good Vixie, beggars can't choose. You know how hard up we are."

"I do indeed," she said bitterly.

"Well!" was all he said, but it was very much in the tone of the Q.E.D. after one of Euclid's rigmaroles.

Violet suddenly gave a merry peal of laughter.

"Upon my word," she said, "I think we are the most wonderful people in the world. Here we are about on the verge of beggary and we are as jolly as sandboys, without the least care or fear of any sort or kind to alloy our happiness for an instant. Some people would be ordering in cartridges for their revolver or sending round to the chemist for chloral."

Coryton joined in the laugh.

"Yes, that's all very fine, but this sort of situation would very soon get beyond a joke. We must think of something."

"After all, if the worst comes to the worst, we can always borrow from our friends."

"The worst must not come to the worst. Borrowing from friends means the destruction of all their other spheres of usefulness. I have always believed in the truth of old Shake-Bacon's injunction, 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.' It is far better to take what you want by strategy. The professor's next instalment in our Automatic Drainage Scheme comes due in a week or two. Meanwhile, all we want is a little ready money to go on with."

"Poor old cock," said Violet, dismissing the professor, with a shrug. "Shall we have another supper-party after the rooms close, with a game of poker to wind up?"

"No, that's risky. People here play too well. Besides, they want such a lot of pressing. As they can play at roulette and trente-et-quarante for eleven hours a day——"

"And be sure of not being cheated."

"Precisely my meaning!—they aren't likely to want to come and play poker afterwards, where that certitude is not so profound."

"What a pity Pidge isn't here."

"Yes. It would almost be worth while going over to Cannes, if that confounded wet-blanket woman weren't there. I must have managed things very badly to let her marry him."

"There are several irons in the fire here that I should not care to leave. There are Mr. Shepheard's investments and Mr. Plantagenet-Unkels's idea of starting a paper, not to mention my Boyard, who only wants me to say the word in order to present me with the most magnificent tiara of diamonds that can be purchased in all Bucharest."

"Come, come, Vixie. It'll soon be my turn to be jealous."

"Your turn! Don't flatter yourself that I was

jealous, conceited boy. However, I'll strike a bargain with you: my Boyard for your Sally."

"My Sally! You scamp. She's only a means to an end. And by Jove! here is the end. . . . . Why, Pigeon, old boy! Who'd have thought of seeing you in this wicked place? Is your wife with you?"

Sure enough it was Tyrconnel, walking along the terrace with an uncertain step, as if the place were strange to him. What a difference between this haggard youth and the eager, sturdy Wilfrid Tyrconnel who had trod this terrace twelve short months before! His face was flushed with the excitement of arrival, and his frail, boyish face looked quite pretty as he stood before them. Both were struck at once by the change in him.

"She is at Cannes. I am only over for the day," he said shortly, in answer to Coryton's question. Then, turning to Violet, he seemed to recover his good spirits and began to rally her on her perennial childhood.

"I wish I could return the compliment, Pidge," she said with affectionate anxiety, "but you are looking decidedly dicky. You want a good bracing up here. I shall tell Gwendolen so when I see her."

Tyrconnel frowned.

"Everybody keeps telling me that I am at death's door," he growled.

"That's all rot," said Coryton, who knew exactly how to manage his ex-charge. "All he wants is a little lunch and, for the matter of that, so do we. Look here, Vixie, take him up to the Grand and order lunch. I'll join you in half an hour. I've a few things to attend to. If you'd only wired you were coming, old man, I'd have arranged to be at your disposal all day."

While the two others slowly made their way up to the Grand Hotel, Tyrconnel complaining grievously of the heat all the while, Coryton hastily made his way into the casino and scrutinized all

the players at the various tables. Gaverigan was at the first table, in the highest spirits, evidently winning heavily. He called out blithely to Coryton to join him, as there was an unheard-of run on the *tiers du cylindre*, but Coryton passed on with a smiling shake of the head. At the next table he paused a moment to watch Williams and Wilmot, who were playing a system, as he had special reasons for wishing to know the state of their finances. He exchanged amenities with Signor Miauli, of Stratford-atte-Bowe, the popular tenor, whom he found staking 100 franc gold bits profusely on the *transversales* from behind Miss Gussie Gutter's chair. That young lady called out gaily to Coryton to come and bring her luck, but he only shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly and passed on to the trente-et-quarante room. Here Lord Pimlico and Miss Theodora Gargoyle were engaged in a fierce wrangle about the fetlocks of a horse called Saucisson, who had won the Grand Prix

de Monte Carlo at Nice, and both appealed to him for corroboration.

They were more difficult to shake off than the rest, but at last he managed to escape and, after one more careful look all round, he made his way into the reading-room, which in those days was downstairs, in a last vain hope of meeting the object of his search. There she was, curled up in a huge arm-chair about three sizes too large for her, voraciously reading the *Vie Parisienne*, or rather its pictures.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" she exclaimed, scarcely looking up as he entered. "Come and explain this bathing-costume to me."

"I am very angry with you, Sally," he replied. "You have wasted my time when every moment is of importance. You said you'd be inside from twelve to one. Why weren't you there?"

"Because I'm broke, if you want to know. But I shouldn't advise your trying to bully me. It's

no use," she added, with a comic attempt at despair.

"All right," he returned, making a motion as if to go away, "it doesn't matter. I had some news for you, but no doubt it will keep."

"Oh! you dear," she said, slapping him on the shoulder and beginning to twist her parasol in a restless way. "Tell me all about it as fast as you can."

"It's only that Tyrconnel's here," he said quietly.

Sally jumped to her feet in a fury and made as though she was off at once.

"Where? where?" she cried excitedly. "I'll have at him, the villain! Shew me where he is this very moment."

"Hush! hush! All in good time. I'll arrange for you to interview him in the course of the day. You must first make up your mind what you are going to say to him."

"I've decided that long ago. I shall go up to him

and slap his face or scratch his eyes or something. See what he had the insolence to send me."

And she held up a note in Tyrconnel's big sprawling hand.

"In answer to your letter of yesterday, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"May I see it? .... '*Madam,*'—Come, that's pretty stiff!—'*Although I do not admit that you have any claim whatever upon me, I am willing to send you £10, as you say you are in distress. I advise you to use it to leave Monte Carlo at once, as I warn you this is the last time I can consent to assist you. Should you write again, your letters will be returned unopened. Yours faithfully,* WILFRID TYRCONNEL.' Well, at any rate you've got something in black and white, that may come in useful by and by."

"Yes, but a tenner!" screamed Sally with all the scorn of a millionaire. "Did you ever hear

of anything so mean in your life? I took it in this morning and planked it down on 16 to 21 and it was swept off the first go. So now I haven't got sixpence to bless myself with."

"Well, you certainly won't get any more if you go and scratch his face. If you promise me not to be silly, I'll try and arrange for you to have a talk with him for a quarter of an hour or so before he goes back to Cannes, and if you don't get what you want then, I've got a much better card up my sleeve for you. Now I must run off to lunch."

"Wait a bit. You might explain it first. I don't trust you an inch further than I can see you. You made a fool of me once before. I'm not going to risk it's happening again."

"Little unbeliever! I've a great mind to let you fend for yourself. A fat lot of gratitude I get for all the trouble I take on your account. However, since you are so anxious to know, I couldn't think of disappointing a lady."

Sally put out her tongue, screwing up her nose so as to display her dazzling little rabbit's teeth. But he pretended not to see and gave her a hasty outline of the plan of campaign he proposed for her. She listened with her head on one side in a picturesque way, smiling incredulously all the while. When he had finished, she said roguishly,

"Yes, and where do you come in?"

"I!" he exclaimed, raising his eyebrows, as if that were a too preposterous suggestion. "It's not my affair. I shall be more than rewarded if Miss de Vere deigns to approve of her humble slave's efforts on her behalf."

Sally gave a shrill, derisive laugh, but beamed with pleasure all over her face, for no compliment ever came amiss to her.

"You are a downright humbug," she said amiably, as he was making his way to the door, "but somehow I can't help liking you."

Coryton made a deep mock bow and hurried out.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLUCKING OF THE PIGEON.

Everyone is as God made him and oftentimes
a great deal worse.

—Sir Edward Coke.

When Coryton reached the Grand Hotel he found lunch just being served.

"We knew you wouldn't like us to wait, and have these good things spoiled," said Violet as he came in. "I think you'll be pleased with what we've ordered."

They were all three very proud of their knowledge of good food and certainly the arts of the

cordon bleu at the Grand were not thrown away upon them. A very savoury *consommé*, clear as liquid amber, put them all in excellent humour from the beginning. It was followed by *coquilles de turbot*, dressed with not too much cheese but just cheese flavouring enough. Then came quails *en casserole* and a salad such as Charles, the head-waiter, always mixed specially for Coryton. He 'showed a piece of bread to some garlic,' as he phrased it, then stirred the bread up vigorously with the lettuce and took it out before serving. Violet always declared this gave you all the naughty feelings of eating garlic, without making it impossible to kiss anybody afterwards for at least twenty-four hours. A *mousse aux framboises* was also appreciated, for they were all sweet-tooths, and they wound up with Turkish coffee. During the meal they drank a pint of Johannisberg with the fish and a bottle of Mouton Rothschild 1874 with the quails. Then *eau-de-vie de Danzic* as a *chasse-*

café before strolling down to the gambling-rooms.

They played together in the rooms for some time and then Violet left them for the concert, as she was especially anxious not to miss Saint-Saëns's 'Danse Macabre.' It always sounds so weird and impressive in the big, dim, fantastic concert-room, which seems more in harmony with that piece than almost any other.

"You can almost see the goblins skipping along the edge of the stage as the violins go 'Ping! Ping! Ping!'" she said. "And the double-shuffle of the dwarf devils, who form the chorus, is amazingly creepy. You really ought to come and hear it, Wilfrid, instead of staying here to lose money."

"The Pigeon's got the roulette-devil to tackle," said Coryton, making signs to his wife not to press her suggestion. "That's about as much as he can manage without running after your blue devils too."

So Coryton and Tyrconnel remained playing side by side at the trente-et-quarante table. The for-

mer had long ago come to the conclusion that nobody but a millionaire can win against the bank at Monte Carlo, and he never played save with an ulterior object. Now he sat with a little pile of gold in front of him, making a great display of interest, pricking each announcement of the winning colour diligently on one of the ruled cards provided by the administration; but all the while he never staked more than the minimum of a louis at a time, and that not every coup. At the end of an hour and a half he was three louis to the good and announced that he had had enough of it, and that it was not worth all those emotions to win such a small sum.

His companion had been plunging heavily, having begun with five hundred francs at a time and increased his stakes as he won. After an hour's play he was staking maximums every time and had a goodly pile of notes in front of him. Happening to look up just then, he noticed a very

malevolent little face scowling at him from behind the croupier opposite.

"Heavens!" he growled to himself. "Am I never to be free from this haunting curse of my old indiscretion? Am I doomed to have my path crossed by this vile woman every time I go out of doors?"

He grew very impatient and began to play recklessly. He argued with himself that he had known Sally was at Monte Carlo and that, if he could not stand seeing her, he ought not to have come. But it was all in vain. A blight seemed to have come over him and smothered all the joyousness of the good humour that had buoyed him up; it had taken all the sweetness even out of the incomparable pleasure of a run of luck. It was now fast turning into an avalanche of disaster, this run of luck. Sally's malevolent gaze was upon him and seemed to cast a spell, so that he could do nothing right. Nobody but a gambler can have

any idea how rapidly a big pile of big bank notes will vanish, if only you have lost your head and are playing recklessly.

By the time that Coryton had turned round and announced his intention of stopping, content with his meagre gains, the pile had melted away and Tyrconnel was left with one solitary thousand franc note, which he tossed gloomily upon red.

"*Un après!*" the croupier announced.

Tyrconnel gave a gesture of impatience, as he saw his last note swept on to the line to denote that it was 'in prison' and the impatience was heightened to indignation, as he saw a mocking smile light up Sally's provokingly childish face. The cards were dealt out again.

"*Neuf*," said the croupier, announcing a heavy point for black.

Tyrconnel gave a faint smile of hope at the imminent prospect of getting back his last note. It would be the turning point and he would have

another run of good luck, if only to spite Sally. While he was building these castles in the air, the cards had been dealt and there was a whisper of vexation half way round the table. They were four court cards for red!

"*Quarante*," said the croupier mechanically; "*rouge perd, couleur gagne.*" And a long rake came down and whisked off Tyrconnel's last note.

"Well," he said, with an affectation of indifference, "I suppose I must go round to Smith's for some more money. I am absolutely stony now." Whereupon he got up and went slowly out of the room with Coryton, studiously avoiding Sally's gaze as he did so.

Tyrconnel was well known at the bank and had no difficulty in cashing all the cheques he required. As they walked back to the rooms, Coryton put his arm affectionately through Tyrconnel's and said in his most caressing, confidential manner,

"Old man, I want to speak to you on a rather delicate matter, but I want you to promise me you won't be offended."

Tyrconnel promised, as one does on such occasions, without enthusiasm.

"It's about Sally Popkins. She tells me you sent her a tenner."

Tyrconnel started at the mention of the name and then flushed up resentfully as Coryton entered into details.

"Well?" he said, shaking himself free and looking Coryton full in the eyes.

"I think you are rather hard on her," he replied. "After all, you cannot divest yourself of some responsibility for her present position."

"Oh! come now," he exclaimed hotly, "that is rather a large order. She was not precisely a type of innocence when I first made her acquaintance. That Cottenham dinner was the beginning and end of it all, as far as I am

concerned. What possible claim could she have upon me now?"

"If you don't think she has, it is not for me to interfere. I certainly never expected that you would be mean."

"Mean! I never was called mean before. Now tell me candidly, do you think I am in any way responsible? Come now, as a man of the world."

"Everyone of her admirers might disclaim responsibility in the same way. However, I will say no more. It is no concern of mine and I certainly don't want to quarrel with you about Sally Popkins."

They had reached the casino entrance, but Tyrconnel led the way round the building towards the terrace without a word.

After a silence of some minutes, he said abruptly, "Corry, if you think I owe the girl any reparation, I will send her money, but nothing shall induce me to speak to her again."

"That's my good Pigeon," said Coryton patro-

nizingly. "I knew you would. You know me well enough to be sure that I would not advise you to do anything quixotic or unnecessary. But the fact is, the girl isn't the reprobate you have been inclined to take her for and I know that, if she were given a chance, she would ask nothing better than to keep straight in future. The difficulty always is that, when women start on that —line of country, they never get a chance of pulling up; they never have savings, no one would think of giving them honest employment, and they have no choice but to go on as they have begun. Now if I could raise a hundred or so for her, I could get her started as a florist in Belgravia, where she would have an opportunity of making a good thing of it and, as she would have the comforts she has got accustomed to, there would be less danger of her relapsing to her old ways. I think that is wiser than encouraging her to go back on to the stage, don't you?"

Tyrconnel looked Coryton full in the face long and thoughtfully.

"You are a kind-hearted chap, Corry," he said as they leaned against the parapet of the terrace, watching a pigeon flutter out of its trap and then roll over and over in the dust, as a gun flashed out.

The most picturesque part of the scene was the retriever that ran out at once and marched back triumphantly, with tail erect, carrying the dead bird in its mouth, while a man in a wonderful sort of Robin Hood costume trotted out at the double to refill the trap. There were a series of paths worn away in the turf from his starting-point to each of the pigeon-traps, showing how equally the law of averages operated in the frequency with which they were opened.

"I have always said you weren't half so cynical as you try to make yourself out," Tyrconnel pursued. "Of course I will help about the poor girl and I am sure I ought to be much obliged to you for

letting me know the real facts of the case. She wrote and asked me to help her to leave Monte Carlo and I sent her a tenner for that purpose, fully imagining all the same that she intended to blew it away at the tables. How much do you say you want for her? Here are five thousand francs."

And he held out some notes. But Coryton made no sign of taking them.

"Won't you give them to her yourself?" he asked. "I am sure she would value them a great deal more, and it would be an excellent opportunity for offering her a little good advice."

"No, no, my dear fellow, I couldn't. Do me this favour. I shall be most awfully obliged. Here, take them.... And now let's talk of something else."

"I am sure you will never repent this good action," said Coryton pocketing the notes. "I daresay I shall get an opportunity of giving them to her in the rooms to-night."

*

The scene in the rooms after dinner was fast and furious. It seemed as if the players could not lose their money fast enough,—so hotly did they jostle and wrangle round the tables. Coryton was heartily sick of it all long before the announcement of the last three spins. But he had made up his mind to stay and see Tyrconnel off at the station by the *train des décavés*, which, so far as Tyrconnel was concerned, was appropriately named that day. He had needed to make a number of visits to Smith's bank in the course of the afternoon and was about £1000 out on the day, besides what he had given Coryton for Sally. After the train was gone, Coryton made his way to the Café de Paris, where he found Sally seated at a little table drinking curaçoa and waiting for him by appointment.

She looked very fresh and desirable in her long sealskin and dainty mauve skirt, with her face exquisitely made up and her feet resting on a

neighbouring chair so as to display a very smart pair of shoes and two most neatly turned little ankles. So a cut-throat looking Roumanian boyard seemed to think, much to Sally's annoyance, which she was vainly trying to put into words when Coryton came up. The boyard bowed to Coryton and moved off in search of more promising conquests.

"What a long time you have been," exclaimed Sally petulantly. "I hope you bring me money in proportion."

"Alas! Sally," replied Coryton with mock contrition, "I did all I could. At first he wouldn't hear of doing anything. But I told him you were threatening to go to his wife——"

"And that fetched him, eh?"

"Not a bit of it. He only laughed and said you would never dare to and that, if you did, she would never believe you. Then I tried a different tack and said you were very anxious to reform

and only wanted a little money to enable you to do so. I piled it on as thick as I could and really thought at one time I had got him. But after all he only gave me this for you." Coryton held out a note.

"What! only a 'sing-song'.* He is a mean brute. What's the use of a wretched £20, when I am dead broke, and in this hole of all places?"

Sally's voice trembled with emotion and for a moment it seemed as if she would give way to an outburst of passionate tears.

"But I'll be even with him yet. I'll go to his psalm-singing wife and tell her a tale that'll startle her, if it's only to spite him for being so infernally mean. Look here, Coryton, you are not a bad sort and I'm grateful to you for what you have done, though I'm pretty sure you wouldn't have done it, if it hadn't been to serve your own purposes."

* Monte-Carlo slang for 500 francs.

"Odd that I should be for ever misjudged in this way and thought incapable of any but the lowest motives," ejaculated Coryton with mock heroics.

"No, I don't say that," said Sally, taking his lamentations seriously. "You've always acted straight with me and I like you better than the rest of them. But now I want you to give me a tip what to do—how to get away from here."

"We must talk it over and that means something to drink," replied Coryton, rapping the table with his stick.

It was nearly a quarter to one when Coryton parted from his fair companion at the door of her hotel. He smiled to himself all the way up to the Grand and all the way up to his rooms. There he found Violet in anything but a smiling mood.

"You have been talking to that woman again," she said irritably.

"Yes, darling," he replied in his ever-suave tones, "but to some purpose and for the last time. How did you get on at roulette?"

"I won twenty louis playing a very careful game and then I won thirty more from Shepheard at écarté after the rooms closed. So you see I have not been idle—which is just as well for you," she added laughing, "or I shouldn't be so amiable and forgiving to you."

"You'll be more forgiving still, when you hear what I've done," he said. "I've made £180 on the day, but not by gambling."

"Oh! do tell me how," she said, clapping her hands childishly.

When he had related the events, she grew grave and made no remark for some time. Then she said in a sweet, low voice,

"It's playing it rather low, isn't it? But I am proud of you, for you are so clever and so thoughtful to me. Only I do wish we could afford

to be honest. That is the luxury I covet most of all."

He kissed her tenderly and said, "No doubt we shall be able to afford it some day. But we mustn't be too extravagant all at once. If we are only patient, no doubt even honesty will one day be within our reach."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SERPENT IN THE EDEN.

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!
—St. James, iii, 5.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon: the day was scarce yet dying. It had been a perfect Riviera day, a day of blue sky, soft warm breezes, and sunny lambent air. One of those days—all too scarce even on the Riviera—which make one forget the fog and damp of Northern climes and turn with gladness to the sunshine and flowers of this favoured portion of God's earth.

Gwendolen was sitting reading in their handsome

salon on the first floor of the Hôtel Beau-site at Cannes. The windows, partly open to the sunny air, revealed glimpses of green palm trees, and of the broad blue of the tideless Mediterranean. The room was full of flowers—flowers everywhere—roses, bright-hued anemones, delicate feathery branches of mimosa, tulips, violets—all scattered about in prodigal confusion. On a table by her side stood a photograph of her husband smiling at her from out its velvet frame, and before it, grouped like flowers before a shrine, was a low vase filled with white lilies. The piano was open, and on it was his favourite song—the one he loved to hear her sing best. She had been singing it a while ago and was still crooning over the fragment of some wordless melody as she read.

She had been alone all the afternoon. Wilfrid was gone over to Nice to pay a duty visit to some people there—friends of Lord Baltinglass. Gwendolen had half thought of going with him,

but as they had been out together all the morning, she felt a little tired and, at the last moment, he persuaded her to stay at home. She looked very fair and pure in a loose flowing gown of some soft creamy texture. A half-opened rosebud nestled among the laces of her throat. His lips had touched it before he placed it there; its faint fragrance recalled him to her now, and brought up the happy smile which was playing around her lips.

Gwendolen was very happy just now, with that calm serene happiness, which one often sees in women of her type. Since her husband had broken away from her that Sunday evening and had followed up his revolt by the trip to Monte Carlo, there had been no more differences between them. A change had come over the spirit of her dream. The masterful tones in which he had resented her interference, made her love him in secret the more. His scornful words, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' rang in her ears all the next

day. She had been too hasty, too precipitate, she said to herself. She had taken too much upon herself, pressed him too hard, she had not made sufficient allowance for his emotional nature; the old Adam would not die in a day, Satan was making a strong fight. But she would win—yes, she would win. The light of a holy enthusiasm lit up her face. But how? Wilfrid's was a nature to be led, not driven, henceforth she would lead him by the golden chain of love, not drive him with hard words or cram him with Scriptural texts. She must change her tactics.

So when he came back from Monte Carlo that night, rather down in the mouth and fully expecting a lecture, she greeted him to his surprise with kisses and loving words. Not a word of reproach did she utter; she even hoped that he had 'spent a pleasant day,' and she heaped coals of fire upon his head by turning up at breakfast the next morning, fresh and smiling, full of soli-

citude for his health and of plans for their mutual happiness.

Tyrconnel was full of delight and surprise at this sudden change. He met her advances graciously, and down in his heart he laid a flattering unction to his soul. "That comes of showing a woman who is master," he said to himself. All his irritability and ill-humour vanished and his love for his wife revived again under the sunshine of her smiles. He felt a little ashamed of himself too; he had not been quite frank with her. That scene with Sally still rankled in his memory—however, that was all settled now, thank goodness—Coryton would see to that; and she would trouble him no more. In this new mood his wife became to him infinitely dearer, infinitely more lovable. When he thought of going to Monte Carlo again, she offered no objection; but things became so pleasant at home that he gradually ceased to wish to go there at all. Perfect harmony was

restored between them, into their waning honeymoon there came a sort of St. Martin's summer, an after-glow of love. The young wife sometimes blamed herself for being so happy. Surely it was sinful to fix her affections thus on any earthly object. But young love is strong and young love is thoughtless. After all, she was but a woman and she loved—and human nature is much the same,—whether it be the saint's or the sinner's.

Thus had drifted on the golden sunny days, the present all, the joy of loving enough.

Gwendolen glanced at the time-piece. It was only a little past four! He would not be back for some time yet. She felt inclined to scold laggard Time because he went not with swifter feet.

"A visitor for Madame," said the waiter entering the room with the noiseless step of the well-trained Swiss. "Does Madame receive?"

Gwendolen took the card from the salver and looked at it with languid curiosity. It was a

small oblong card, shaped like a man's, but on it was inscribed Miss de Vere, Alpha Cottage, Beta Road, St. John's Wood. Neither the name nor the address conveyed any meaning to the innocent Gwendolen. She regarded the card with a puzzled air.

"There must be some mistake," she said, "I do not know the lady."

"There is no mistake, Madame," replied the waiter impassively. "The lady asked especially for the Honourable Mrs. Tyrconnel, and if you were engaged she would wait she said."

Gwendolen's first impulse was to refuse; then she looked at the time-piece again. It would be a long time before Wilfrid came home. She was more than wearied of her own society. Perhaps too, it was a little spice of feminine curiosity which prompted her to say:

"I will see her, ask her to come up."

The waiter bowed and withdrew, presently reappearing to announce "Miss de Vere."

Sally entered with a timid hesitating step. She was got up for the part with some skill. She had donned an old black dress and quite a shabby hat; her face was absolutely innocent of rouge, though there might have been a suspicion of *blanc de perles.* Her fringe was out of curl; her eyes were cast down sadly on the floor.

"The Honourable Mrs. Tyrconnel?" she said interrogatively when the waiter had closed the door.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Tyrconnel," answered Gwendolen kindly. "Pray be seated and tell me what I can do for you."

She looked very nervous, this poor little thing; perhaps she was a teacher of English, a governess, or something of the kind, who wanted befriending in a foreign land. And yet—she did not look quite like a governess; Gwendolen had had no experience of young women of Sally's type, either with their war-paint on, or without. She was as innocent as a child.

Sally eyed her doubtfully. She had not come prepared for this gracious greeting. She had understood from Mr. Coryton that young Mrs. Tyrconnel was a very religious person, and religion in Sally's mind was associated with straight-backed spinsters and aggressive matrons, withering looks, frigid words and a sort of 'do-not-contaminate-me' manner. If she had been received in this way, she had a retort ready to hand; she would have been easy enough. As it was, she felt a little nonplussed. She looked about her in a helpless sort of way, not knowing how to begin.

"Pray tell me what I can do for you," said Gwendolen encouragingly.

Sally's eyes wandered around the room until they fell upon the photograph of Tyrconnel. That nerved her. A gleam of resentment shone in her eyes. 'There is no hatred like a woman scorned.' The more concealed it is, the more dangerous is the venom, and in this instance the

venom was prompted almost as much by resentment as by greed.

"I am very—very unhappy," she said and burst into tears.

She could not have begun better. Gwendolen's sympathies were aroused in an instant. She got up from her chair and, coming across to where the other was sitting with bowed head, touched her on the shoulder.

"I am so sorry," she said gently, "tell me what your trouble is."

"I don't know how to tell you," whimpered Sally, rubbing her eyes the harder. "Oh dear! —oh dear!—to think it should have come to this."

Gwendolen looked perplexed at this somewhat irrelevant outburst. However, she waited patiently; she did not like to force a confidence. She saw that her visitor was in trouble, and like most amateur philanthropists, she had no power to distinguish between the genuine and the false. Here was an

opportunity for her to translate into practice some of her beautiful theories. Meanwhile the astute little actress went on sniffing behind her pocket-handkerchief.

"Come, tell me what your trouble is about," said Gwendolen presently. Then she added in a tone of apology for her words, "You see, I cannot help you until I know."

"What is it about?" echoed Sally—Ah! I forgot—you know nothing." Then with a tragic gesture towards the photograph, "It's about *him!*"

Gwendolen looked in the direction indicated in silent astonishment. Had this young person taken leave of her senses? Perhaps she referred to some unknown 'him.' But no, one of Sally's hands covered her eyes, the other pointed an accusing forefinger straight at Wilfrid's photograph.

"My husband," said Gwendolen vaguely. "Surely there must be some mistake." Then a sudden fear rushed over her, her heart leapt to her

mouth. "Tell me," she cried, "is it bad news? Has anything happened to him?—Oh! tell me quickly—quickly. I can bear anything but the suspense."

"Him," said Sally scornfully. "Oh! nothing has happened to him that I know of—he's right enough, you may be sure. It is what has happened to me. Oh dear!—Oh dear!" she went on, rocking herself to and fro. "To think I should live to see this day. You, his wife, and I—nothing—nothing."

Her simulated sobs broke forth afresh.

Gwendolen drew herself proudly up and moved a little distance off.

"What do you mean?" she said coldly, with a gesture that a Roman matron might have envied.

"There!" said Sally brokenly. "I might have known it!—I might have known how you would have taken it. You are like all the rest. It is always the poor girl who suffers. She is always blamed, trampled on, despised, while the man goes

scot-free." "I do not understand you," said Gwendolen, growing pale to the lips. "My ideas of right and wrong are the same in the case of both men and women. But I do not know what you mean—to what you refer. My husband is nothing—can be nothing—to you, nor you to him—nothing," she added with strained insistence.

"Nothing—nothing now," repeated Sally sadly, the corners of her baby-mouth drooping again. "Ah! that is the pity of it. And yet once he vowed by all the vows. Ah! me—I had better die."

So might Marguerite have spoken of her betrayal.

Gwendolen looked at her with astonishment and indignation. A passionate denial rose to her lips. She moved towards the bell. But as she did so, some faint chord in her memory vibrated again. Where had she seen that face before?—Ah! she remembered.

"Tell me," she said quickly, "were you not at Henley?"

"Yes," replied Sally in the same mournful cadence, noting the change of purpose nevertheless. ("Meant to turn me out, did she?" she thought to herself.) "Yes—I am not likely to forget it. I passed you on the river. He looked at me as if I was dirt. You and he were sitting together in a boat beneath the alder-trees."

Gwendolen bowed her head to hide the vague dread in her eyes. Little links pieced themselves together in her chain of memory. The look she had noticed on the girl's face that day, Wilfrid's confusion, his evasive answer to her query—all rushed before her again. She put her hand to her throat, something hurt her there.... What mystery was this? What did it mean? Into the sunshine of her young love there stole the shadow of distrust.

From behind her pocket-handkerchief Sally noted everything. She was quick to follow up the advantage she had gained.

"I was only a poor ignorant girl," she continued in the same melancholy monotone, "and he a gentleman born. I did wrong of course, but then I was so young—and I loved him—not wisely, but too well." (She remembered this phrase in some play she had acted in.) "I gave up everything for him—then I was cast off, ruined, thrown aside like an old shoe—and in those days at Cambridge I thought—fool that I was—that he loved me."

Gwendolen staggered back and put her hand on the table for support. As she did so, the photograph fell with a crash to the floor. It lay there unheeded. Her breath was coming in short quick beats, her eyes were wide with horror.

"At Cambridge!" she gasped.

"Yes," said Sally, warming to her part, "Oh! how I wish I had never heard of the place, I was innocent till I went there. I went at first with *The Frivolity* Company. I was earning £10 a week," (As a matter of fact she had never earned more

than £4 even in the ante-Pimlico days,) "and I should be now, if only I hadn't been led astray. I was at Cambridge off and on, after that—after I met him—whenever he wanted me to go. Last time I was there was February year. 'Twas about me he got sent down." And then, noticing the flash of indignation, which spread itself over her listener's face, she changed her tack. "Oh dear,—Oh dear," she wailed, "if my poor mother could but see me now!"

She burst into tears once more.

Gwendolen tried to speak, but could not—tried to think, but could not. The thought that her husband—the man she loved, should have been linked with this low intrigue stunned her. She felt degraded, ashamed. Her purity, her outraged love were both in arms. She recoiled in disgust—the thing was monstrous, incredible. She turned on Sally with sudden scorn.

"How dare you—how dare you!" she cried.

"*My husband!* I do not believe you—I *will* not ". . . . .

It was then that Sally rose to her greatest height. Had she been a less accomplished actress, a less consummate hypocrite, she would have met Gwendolen's scorn with words as angry as her own. But she saw that her disbelief was only half-hearted, that she was struggling against her growing convictions. She met her angry gaze with sorrowful eyes, with an air of injured innocence.

"In that case there is nothing more to be said," she answered in a broken despairing kind of way, rising from her chair as she spoke. "I might have known it all along: it is the poor girl who always suffers. That is what he said—'Who will believe you?' He was right. I had better go——"

She made as though to go to the door, moving with feeble uncertain steps. All the same she

fully meant to turn back if Gwendolen didn't stop her.

But Gwendolen did. Her anger died away as she looked at the bowed figure and listened to those unresentful hopeless words. After all, the poor girl was probably more sinned against than sinning. In her divine charity, she was willing to make every allowance for this penitent Magdalene—this weak erring sister, the victim of man's selfish passion. The very way in which she had met her anger brought conviction with it. The cold, sick fear tightened itself around her heart. She laid an arresting hand on the other's arm.

"Forgive me," she said mastering herself with an effort. "I was too hasty—perhaps. I will hear all you have to say—do you hear me? All. Let me know the worst."

Then Sally told, falsifying facts, putting her own gloss upon everything, representing herself as the tempted, Tyrconnel as the tempter; she the

betrayed, he the betrayer; he had ruined her, abandoned her, wrecked her life. Yet she was careful always to speak of him more in sorrow than in anger. Of course she magnified the Cambridge incident out of all its true proportions, and upon this slender foundation of fact she reared a whole edifice of falsehood. It was just this substratum of truth which made the lie so difficult to detect.

Gwendolen listened in silence, keeping mastery over herself by a tremendous effort. All the warm sweetness of her young love turned to gall as she listened. Her innocence made her a dupe to this plausible tale; her purity made her hard and cold towards her husband. She had high ideals, this young bride. She did not see things as the world sees them. What to some might have appeared an indiscretion of hot-headed youth, was to her a deadly sin, the very thought of which filled her with loathing, not only towards the sin

but towards the sinner. And then the treachery of it all. He had pretended to tell her everything,—all the weaknesses, all the follies of his life and she had forgiven everything as freely as she hoped to be forgiven. This, then, was the true reason of his having been sent down from Cambridge; until now, the punishment had always seemed to her disproportionate to the offence. What!—he must have left her that very night, when she promised to become his wife, and have gone a few days after, perhaps the very same night to this woman, gone with her love-words still ringing in his ears and with her kisses still warm upon his lips. The thought was torture—she bowed her head in shame—shame for herself, shame for him.

Sally finished her narrative at last and sat silent, watching furtively her victim's face to see how the poison worked. She could glean little from that down-turned face; it was cold as marble, impassive as the Sphinx. No one would have

known the tumult which was going on within. Yet even as she looked, a faint change broke over it. It might not be true. Gwendolen caught at the hope, as a drowning man catches at a straw.

"What proof have you of all this?" she asked, lifting her head suddenly.

"Proof!" echoed Sally with quivering lips, "proof enough. You can easily find out. Everyone knows—ask Pim—ahem! I mean ask Lord Pimlico—ask Mr. Coryton—though they would not like to tell tales against their *friend*," she added with emphasis. "Find out why he was sent down from Cambridge. But here," producing the letter which Tyrconnel had weakly written to her in answer to her urgent appeal—"this, I had from him only the other day—would he be likely to write to me, think you—unless there was a reason for it? Here, read it,"—handing her the letter.

This was another stroke of Sally's genius. She knew the chances were ten to one against Gwen-

dolen's reading the letter. She had gauged her character to a certain extent.

Gwendolen took the letter with a hand which trembled in spite of herself. Yes—the writing on the envelope was in Wilfrid's big sprawling hand. She had seen enough. She gave it back with a proud gesture.

"It is not meant for me to read," she said. "I—I will ask him myself—and now leave me, pray leave me. I wish to be alone."

Yes, she wished to be alone, to think, poor soul, to try and grasp the full horror of this revelation. She did not speak unkindly—there was pity in her face as she turned it towards her companion. Yet she could not help an involuntary recoil. Moments of intense joy or sorrow illumine the character as nothing else can. This moment of anguish revealed Gwendolen, just—but cold and hard.

Sally looked somewhat blank at this uncere-

monious *congé*. It hardly suited her purpose that the interview should terminate like this. Instead of moving, she began to weep again.

"Go!"—she echoed despairingly. "Where am I to go to without money, without friends? The bottom of the sea is the only place for me. He won't help me—he who brought all this trouble upon me, and I—I—am penniless," she whimpered through her tears.

"Penniless!" echoed Gwendolen with astonishment. There was a lower depth still. The man she called husband was not only profligate but mean. But that struck her as so utterly foreign to his character that a faint suspicion stole over her again.

"How did you manage to come out to the Riviera then?" she asked.

Sally hung her head.

"Don't ask me?" she said in a low voice. "Such things are not for your ears—I have sunk

lower and lower since I left Cambridge—since I lost my innocence. There are plenty of temptations for a poor girl like me. But I am tired of it all—I want to lead a good life—that is all I want, a little money to start me. Without it I cannot—I must live."

Gwendolen shuddered. A great rush of pity swept over her, as she looked at the little figure in the shabby black dress. Who was she that she should judge her—her husband's victim, ignorant, illiterate, her very beauty a snare? She had never had a fair chance. How selfish men were, how gross, how brutal! This poor creature had not only been betrayed but abandoned, thrown aside like a broken toy—and her betrayer—God help her! was her husband.

"Penniless!" said Gwendolen again. Then she arose and went over to her desk. There was a roll of bank-notes in it, which Wilfrid had given her only the other day for sundry bills and ex-

penses; there was money also which her father had pressed upon her. She took it all,—all save two bank-notes which she kept back in an afterthought. She thrust the notes and gold in Sally's hands.

"Here," she said hurriedly. "Take this—take this—and may God in His mercy guard you and help you to lead a better life. And now—do not think me unkind—go, I *implore* you—go—I must be alone."

She almost pushed the astonished Sally out of the room and closed the door upon her.

"Well, I never!" said Sally to herself as she tripped down the stairs, "if ever I see such a woman in all my life. That's a good job over and done with any way. Why, there must be nigh upon £200 here if there's a penny! He'll get a bad quarter of an hour when he comes home.... How well she took it too,—so quiet-like. I hope I didn't hurt her feelings more than

I was obliged to. But there, I don't suppose she cares much about him."

From which it may be gathered that women of Gwendolen's type did not altogether come within the range of Sally's mental vision.

CHAPTER V.

FLIGHT.

> The prejudices of men emanate from the mind, and may be overcome; the prejudices of women emanate from the heart, and are impregnable.
>
> —D'Argens.

Gwendolen was alone at last! She looked around her in a bewildered way. She could hardly realize it yet. The flowers and the light seemed to mock her. She passed into the inner room and, throwing herself face downward on the bed, lay there, trying to think, trying to nerve herself for the task which lay before her.

Now and again a faint flicker of hope awoke within her; it might not be true—and yet—and yet—the different parts of the story, dovetailed in with one another so well. Surely no woman would thus lie away her honour? Ah no! It must be true. Wounded love and wounded pride strove together in Gwendolen's heart. And to these was added the horror of the sin. Her standard of morality was a high one. She knew no distinction in the moral code between the man and the woman. In her eyes the fall from purity in the one was as great as the fall in the other. Her feelings were in fact just what her husband's would have been, had a similar tale been told to him of his wife—only he would have disbelieved: she believed.

She lay there battling with the anguish in her soul. Only an hour ago, and her life was full of light and love and happiness. Now it was stripped and bare! She was alone. The brief day faded and died, the gloaming came; but still she

lay there, praying for guidance, thinking—thinking—thinking. Her thoughts all brought her round to the same point. If the story were true—then she and her husband must part.

At last there smote on her ears the sound of an opening door.

"Gwendolen," came her husband's eager voice through the shadows, "Gwendolen!"

But a few hours ago, how she would have welcomed him, how she would have thrown her arms around his neck in eager rapture, scolding him playfully for having tarried so long away from her! Now she confronted him in the waning light, stern and cold as an accusing angel. The struggle she had been through had left its mark upon her. Her face was white and drawn, deep lines had cut themselves across her brow, and around the corners of her mouth. In her eyes there was a look Tyrconnel had never seen before.

"Gwendolen, dear one," he cried in alarm, coming

towards her. " What is the matter? Are you ill? "

He would have taken her in his arms, but she waved him off.

"Tell me," she said in a low intense voice, ignoring his question, "Tell me, is this vile thing true? "

" What thing? " he asked in astonishment. " What on earth do you mean? Why do you look at me like this? "

"This will explain," she answered briefly and she held out to him Sally's card, which until now had been clutched in her hand. "Does this convey any meaning to you?"

Tyrconnel took it wonderingly. As he read the name a great revulsion of feeling swept over him. He drew back involuntarily; his breathing became more laboured, the hectic spot burned on his cheek again. His hands grew moist. The serpent had penetrated his Eden. This then was the meaning of Sally's scarce-veiled threat in the begging-letter

she had written to him. She had been here with some false lying tale, poisoning his wife's mind against him. Curse her! Curse her!

He trembled with impotent rage. The hacking cough came on again. In his agitation he could not stop it.

Gwendolen noticed his hesitation, his flushed face, his trembling hands. Her heart sank within her. To her mind these were so many signs of guilt.

"Does this woman's name convey any meaning to you?" she asked again. Her voice was cold and stern. Then suddenly a little break came in it. "Oh! Wilfrid, why do you not speak? Say it does not—say it does not——"

"It conveys to me," he said in a voice thick with anger, "the name of a bad designing woman, who has dared—dared to force herself into your presence—How dare she do this thing?"

Gwendolen recoiled a step. He knew her. Until

now she had hoped faintly—ever so faintly—that he would deny all knowledge of her and her works.

"Need makes one greatly daring," she said bitterly. "You know this woman then. She has told me all—all—do you understand? Answer me, is it true or false?"

"I have told you I know the woman," he said a little impatiently, "and that she is a bad woman—not fit for you to speak to—even to talk about. What has she told you? If you will explain more fully, perhaps I may understand you. At present I confess your meaning is beyond me. What is it you wish to know?"

"Is it true?" she asked again, "that you sinned against her—Is it true or false?"

A red flush burned itself on Tyrconnel's face. The memory of that one false step, of that past slip—in which he was more sinned against than sinning, rose up before him.

"Gwendolen," he faltered, "you do not understand. I——"

She interrupted him with a passionate gesture. In his hesitation she read the confirmation of her worst fears.

"I understand," she said, "but too well. I ask you a plain question, I want a plain answer—Yes or no?"

He looked at her hopelessly. He knew what she was like in these moods—to reason with her was impossible. How could he make her understand? Her very purity, her innocence, fought against him. The repented sin rose up and confronted him in all its hideousness. Surely he had suffered enough for it already.

"Answer me yes or no," she pleaded. "Oh! Wilfrid, if you love me—if you have ever loved me, deny this thing. I cannot bear it."

She covered her face with her hands.

Her grief touched him far more than her anger

had done. His heart ached to wound her so.

"Gwendolen," he said despairingly—"How can I explain to you—innocent as you are about such things. I was guilty of folly—of weakness, I was tempted and I fell—I was not myself—I——"

She staggered back against a chair, her hands fell from her face, she looked at him with eyes wide with repulsion. This was his excuse then; like Adam in the garden ..... '*The woman tempted me.*' Faugh!

"Then it is true," she whispered. "You have betrayed her and deceived me?"

This assumption of his guilt, this sweeping condemnation of his error, was a little too much for Tyrconnel. He was quite prepared to admit that he had done wrong, but not that it was so bad as this. They were to a certain extent at cross purposes. She was thinking of the tissue of falsehood told her by Sally, he of that slip at Cambridge. But the element of fact common

to both, made it the more difficult to distinguish between the true and the false.

"You are hard," he said, "hard and unjust. I do not wish to defend myself. There were extenuating circumstances—but I did wrong, I admit that. I ought to have told you perhaps —but how could I? It was to spare you that I did not. The thing is bad, but why magnify it out of all its true proportions? Surely you will not allow a little thing like this to——"

A wave of disgust swept over Gwendolen's face.

"A little thing," she echoed, "to you perhaps, but not to me—not to her. A wife deceived, a girl betrayed—a little thing! Is it a little thing to her—your victim? Nay, hear me out"—he was about to speak. "Are we women slaves, think you? to be used as you will, and then cast aside like broken toys? Why were you not frank with me? Had I known this, I would rather have

died than have become your wife. You have deceived me and ruined her. You have wrecked both our lives."

Tyrconnel stood aghast at this torrent of reproach. He could not understand it. Allowing for the gloss Sally was sure to have put upon the story, allowing for the way in which purity, such as Gwendolen's, might have been expected to recoil from evil—surely there was nothing in it, even then, to merit this sweeping condemnation.

"You do not understand," he said again,—"there must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake," she said sadly. A stubborn line cut itself around her mouth.

"But let me explain how it was that——"

She raised her head.

"God forbid! Do not pollute your lips nor my ears. I want neither explanation nor palliation. Besides, what difference would it make? You have admitted your guilt—No? .... No? ....

Then I will frame my question another way—Was it on account of this woman that you were sent down from Cambridge?"

He hesitated for a moment, he resented the tone in which the question was put, more than the question itself. Argument and explanation seemed alike impossible to combat Gwendolen's prejudices. He was truthful. She had better know the truth, and then be left to make the best of it.

"I cannot deny it—Yes," he said coldly.

She bowed her head with a low moan—her last atom of hope was gone; it was true then, this horrid thing which was poisoning her life.

He looked at her dumbly and cursed Sally again in his heart. He felt very miserable and a little angry too. It was natural perhaps that Gwendolen should feel it—but not that she should be so unreasonable as this. As the archdeaconess used to say, 'Young men will be young men, and boys will be boys.'

"You take things too seriously," he said, uttering his thoughts aloud.

She looked at him with a world of reproach in her great eyes.

"Too seriously! What would you think if I —I, your wife, had sinned so—and concealed from you my sin."

"Hush—hush!" he said more gently. The mere thought of such a thing in connection with Gwendolen seemed a profanation. "You do not understand, you are a woman, I am a man—that makes the difference."

"Are there then two codes of morality?" she asked with fine scorn, "one for woman, and one for man? Were two sets of commandments given on Sinai? Did Christ preach two Gospels? Not so. In the sight of God the sin is the same, be it man or woman."

"You are young and inexperienced," he said, "or you would not look at things in this light.

In the eyes of the world—and you and I have to live in the world—the two cases are widely different."

"The world!" she replied, "What is the world to me? Did I not always tell you that the world was nothing to me—nothing."

"In the eyes of common-sense then," he said impatiently, a little wearied of the lengthened dialogue and with an uneasy consciousness that he was getting the worst of it. "I do not wish to argue with you, it is useless to argue with an angry woman. As to my 'sin,' as you phrase it, I have told you that I am sorry—more sorry than I can say. Let that be the end of the matter. Whatever happened, it was before I was your husband. I have not failed in my duty since. Do not you fail in your duty to me now."

"My duty—Ah! what is my duty?" she queried more to herself than to him.

"Obedience," he returned almost roughly. "Are

we not told somewhere that 'Obedience is Heaven's first law'—you know more about Heaven than I do,"—this was unkind—"I only know that it is certainly a wife's first duty to her husband. I have told you to let this subject drop, pray do so. In your calmer moments I am willing to explain to you fully, in your present mood it is useless to attempt to do so."

Gwendolen resented the tone; it seemed to add insult to injury. To dictate, to counsel, to argue, these had been her prerogatives. Now it seemed they were to be his. Their previous tiffs had been bad enough, but this was a more serious matter. She maintained a stubborn silence.

Her husband turned on his heel.

"This interview had better end," he said again.

"Yes," she said sadly, "I agree with you. And from to-night there must be an end of everything between you and me. In my own heart I know that I am nothing—can be nothing to you any more."

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed incredulously, arresting his steps.

She lifted her eyes to his. There was a distant look in them. Her words came like one who is repeating a lesson learned by rote.

"I mean that from to-night we are husband and wife in name only. You and I must part. To live with you would be to condone your sin. I see it all now. I doubt if we could have ever been really happy together; this has made it impossible. We must part."

"Part!" he cried, "you and I? Really, Gwendolen—this is carrying it too far—you forget your duty to me—your husband."

"I have a higher duty still," she said solemnly—"my duty towards my God."

"This is too much," he cried angrily, goaded out of all patience by her reproaches. "You are as free with the name of the Deity as the German Emperor. I will waste words with you

no longer. You are unforgiving, ungenerous, unjust. I will leave you to come to your senses. It is I who have been in error. I admit it. I thought you loved me and you do not, you have never really loved me, that is it. Had you done so, you would never have spoken to me as you have done to-night."

So saying, he turned and left her . . . .

Not love him! What then meant those streaming eyes—for tears had come to her relief at last—that gesture of abandonment, with which she threw herself on her knees before the bed—that exceedingly bitter cry which rose to her lips—"Oh God, help me to do right—help me to do right!"

But when she arose from her knees at last, a light shone in her eyes, clear and strong. It was the light, which shines on the face of one who has been through a fierce conflict and has come out the victor; of one who has resolved on a definite purpose, who knows no change, neither shadow of turning.

Meanwhile Tyrconnel had gone off in high dudgeon. He felt hurt, wounded, angry, all the more so because in his heart there was a lurking consciousness that he was in the wrong. He was prepared to admit it; he had admitted it—but that was no reason why his wife should exaggerate the offence in this way, refuse to hear his explanation, spurn his excuses, speak to him as though he were a criminal of the deepest dye.

Once more the sense of their inherent incompatibility of temperament was borne in upon him. How could he agree with a woman who looked at everything in such an uncompromising light, who seemed incapable of understanding the weaknesses and errors of human nature, who was always in the right, never in the wrong, who was as pure and flawless as snow, and as cold. Such a one might be perfect to worship from a distance, but to live with—that was another thing. To-day she had shown herself hard, unforgiving—nay,

more, unjust. He would leave her to herself for a time, and meet her averted looks and cold words with words and looks as distant as her own. He had been too yielding to her—not firm enough, that was it. She must learn who was master.

Not for a moment did he think she would put her threat of leaving him into execution. He deemed it mere idle words uttered by an unreasonable woman, in a moment of anger. He had not forgotten their dispute about Monte Carlo. To-morrow, when a night had brought reflection and she realized that he meant to be firm, she would probably yield him that obedience which she had hitherto refused; if not, he must make the lesson harder. He had quite argued himself into believing that he was the aggrieved one by this time.

Full of doughty resolve, he dined alone—or rather he made a feint of eating his dinner. Hitherto he and Gwendolen had dined together in their private rooms—to-night he went down to the

public dining-room and sat down at one of the little round tables. But it was dull work; he could not eat, he felt sick at heart. He passed most of the dishes untasted and, though he drank a good deal of wine, it did not seem to have much effect in rousing his drooping spirits. So after coffee and a cigarette, he lighted a cigar and went out for a stroll.

He walked some little distance, and then sat down on a bench. He felt strangely fatigued and overwrought, it was astonishing how little tired him now. He sat there a long time. It was an unwise thing to do, for the night was chilly and he had no overcoat—his cough was very trouble-some. But no one cared, he thought to himself bitterly.

Was this the perfect happiness he had dreamed of—hungered after—thirsted for? Gwendolen was his wife; he had attained his soul's desire only to find, as so many have found before, that, like

Dead-Sea apples, the fruit of his longing had turned to ashes on his lips. This was—marriage.

The wind was cold, he shivered and buttoned his coat around him. Yet the wind bore on its breath the scent of orange-flowers and violets from the villa gardens hard by, and somehow or other the fragrance reminded him of Gwendolen—of Gwendolen as he had known her in the first hours of their married life—as he had known her again yesterday—known her but that morning—soft, gentle, yielding, basking in the sunshine of his smiles, full of love and caressing words. A sudden revulsion swept over him, the love within him stirred again. Poor Gwendolen! He had been too hard on her perhaps, he had not made sufficient allowance for her in the first shock of this revelation. He could not realize how a pure and innocent nature such as hers would recoil from the contact with evil. Poor Gwendolen! What was she doing now, he wondered? Was she as

miserable and as lonely as he? He took out his watch and looked at it by the light of a match. Nearly ten o'clock! This was about the time she was wont to sing to him . . . . When the singing was over, she would come and sit on a low stool at his feet, and lean her head against his knees—and they would talk together in the dim light, of all their hopes and plans in the new life which lay before them . . . . A great rush of shame and compunction swept over him, as his thoughts dwelt thus. His was all the blame, all the wrong. All thought of resentment and of domination passed away. He would go to her—go as a suppliant and tell her he was sorry for what had passed, and she—she would forgive him, and they would be happy once more.

Full of this new-born desire, he arose and walked quickly back to the hotel. He sprang up the stairs, three at a time. There was no one in the sitting-room. But the lamps were lighted, the

coffee-tray was arranged on a little table by Gwendolen's chair, and by its side was a folded *Galignani*. On a chair were two or three unopened parcels, the fruits of their morning's shopping . . . . There were too many flowers in the room, their odour seemed to stifle him . . . . He crossed over quickly to the door of Gwendolen's room and knocked. No answer came.

He knocked again.

"Gwendolen," he said. "Gwendolen! It is I—your husband."

There was no reply, neither was there any sound nor movement. An indefinable dread stole over Tyrconnel. What was the matter? Was she still angry with him?—Was she ill?—Was—ah God! not that!

He burst open the door and entered. His suspicion deepened to a certainty. No one was there. The room was in a state of confusion, drawers were pulled open, clothes scattered here

and there—on the dressing-table lay, in a heap, the rings and jewels and trinkets he had given her.

As his eyes fell upon them, the truth flashed over him; he staggered backward with a groan.

Gwendolen had gone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Be not righteous overmuch.
—Ecclesiastes.

The 8.30 p.m. train from Liverpool Street steamed into the Cambridge station one wet gusty night. Among the passengers which it deposited was a sad, weary-looking woman.

It was Gwendolen. One would hardly have known her, as she stood on the cheerless platform looking after the red lights of the departing train, so changed was she. How altered that once happy face with its wild-rose bloom! How different

that bowed, saddened woman from the smiling, blushing bride who had left this spot only a month or so ago!

Now her eyelids were swollen with weeping, her cheeks were colourless, her eyes lacked lustre. She was faint from lack of food, her limbs ached with fatigue, her head was dizzy from the rush and rattle of her ceaseless journey. As she stood there, a great rush of self-pity swept over her. This, then, was the end of her honeymoon, this her return home!

"Any luggage, ma'am?" asked a porter, touching his cap to the solitary figure standing beneath the flickering gas-light.

Gwendolen started from her reverie and pointed to her one small trunk—all that she had brought with her from the far-off southern land. Alas! how very far off it seemed to her now. She shivered slightly and gathered her mantle closer around her. Everything looked bare, cheerless, desolate,

like her own wrecked life. All the warmth and sunshine she had left behind her in that land of love and flowers. Here there was nothing but mist and driving rain.

The porter shouldered her box and she followed him to the cab—an old musty four-wheeler, the only one available this rough night.

Not until the door was shut and she was being rattled along the road towards Newnham, did she realize what it was that she had done. For the first time in her headlong flight a faint shadow of doubt—not as to the course she had adopted, but as to the reception she would meet with—crossed her mind. Hitherto the bitter sense of injury, the need of having her wits about her, the very excitement of the journey had kept her up. It was a new experience to her, that journey across Europe—to her who had never been allowed to travel alone even from Cambridge to London before. How she accomplished the journey she

hardly knew. Looking back it seemed like some evil dream.

The moment her husband had left her she had begun to act upon her suddenly-formed resolution. She hastily packed the few things she needed most in one of the smallest of her trunks. Then she rang the bell, ordered a fly and drove to the station. The hotel-keeper was somewhat surprised, but he had lived too long in the neighbourhood of Monte Carlo to be very much astonished at the eccentricities of woman-kind. Madame was departing? *N'importe*, Monsieur remained, and he would pay the bill. So he bowed Gwendolen down the steps with an impassive countenance, and sent the hall-porter with her to the station to take her ticket, explain her route, and see her off.

Gwendolen travelled night and day. How the time passed she could not tell, she scarcely had any consciousness of her surroundings.

Now the journey was accomplished. But the

worst was to come: the servants' scarce-concealed surprise, her aunt's shrill anger, and later on the world's sneers. All would have to be faced. Gwendolen's heart sank within her. In the first moment of her passionate indignation, when she threw the gauntlet down at her husband's feet, she had told him—and told him truly—that she cared nothing for the world. Brave words indeed! But it is one thing to despise the conventions, another to set them at defiance. And so Gwendolen was to find it.

But her purpose never swerved, her courage never really faltered. It is impossible for a worldling to understand the light in which this young girl, with her narrow views, her child-like faith, her Christ-like ideas, her passionless purity, viewed her husband's wrong-doing. There was the deceit practised on her, the wrong done—as she believed—to a confiding girl, and most of all there was his fall from purity. In this first horrible

surprise, this sudden darkening of the dream of her young life, this clouding over of every hope, she felt she could not live with him. And yet she loved him! But she thrust away that love as sin—as an unholy thing. If she were to remain under the same roof with him, see his face, hear his voice, she knew that her weakness would conquer her, that she would condone his fall and in condoning it forget what she believed to be the higher instincts of her nature and become a partaker of his sin. No, her only safety lay in flight, if she remained with him, her good resolutions would falter, her individuality would become merged in his.

In the wild desire to be away from him—in the shock of her shattered ideal, whither should she flee but to the home which had sheltered her, to the father who loved her? As she thought of him, the fear of her aunt's anger, the dread of the world's scorn faded away. A sense of great

comfort stole over her. Her father! Never until now had the full sense of his protection, his love, his unwearying patience been borne in upon her. He had been ignored and set aside. But now in her anguish she turned naturally to him, the author of her being, the one who most loved her. He would shelter her, and would shield her from the world's cheap sneers, his love would make the stony way less rough, the upward path less thorny to her bleeding feet. Oh! How she longed to weep out her sorrows on his breast.

Every moment brought her nearer to him. The cab jolted down Mill Lane and over the bridge, the rain beating against the panes. They were under the great elms now, on the Backs. She pressed her face against the glass, but she could see little. Now they had turned in at the gate. She was at home.

Gwendolen got out and put her hand on the bell. She faltered a moment, uncertain, and looked

up at the darkened house. How still everything was, how desolate. The house was all in darkness, save where a light burned dimly in an upper room . . . . it was her father's room . . . . . A strange eerie feeling crept over her. She pulled the bell sharply. No one answered. What a long time they were in coming, to be sure! She pulled again—Ah! here was someone coming at last . . . . .

Why did the man look at her with that scared face? What was the vague, undefinable something which hung over all. A chill struck Gwendolen's heart.

"What is the matter?" she asked hurriedly. "Where is your master? I wish to see him at once."

"Oh! Lor', Ma'am," said the servant, scared out of his senses at this unexpected apparition, and blurting out the truth with brutal suddenness. "Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Master's dead!"

"Dead!" gasped Gwendolen with whitened lips, falling back against the wall.

"Yes, Ma'am," answered the servant garrulously, with that air of ghoulish relish, with which servants always like to impart bad news—"he died this afternoon, about four o'clock, all of a sudden like. He had a telegram to say as 'ow he had lost all his money"—(The man had taken advantage of the general confusion to read it) "and it took his heart, which has been affected a long time, the doctor says. Mrs. Miles"—he forgot the 'de Courcy' in his haste—"is mortal bad too,—high sterics,—something awful. She've bin going from one fit to another, it's as much as me and Jane could do to 'old her down. There now, Ma'am, don't take on so," he added soothingly, moved to compassion by the sight of the anguish on that pale drawn face.

"Where is he? Take me to him," gasped Gwendolen, rallying herself with an effort.

The servant led the way silently. There was something in the intensity of her sorrow, which checked even his garrulity. In the chamber Death's grim satellites had done their dread work; all was quiet and peaceful now.

With one glance at the sheeted outline Gwendolen threw herself down upon the bed, with an exceeding bitter cry.

This was her welcome home.

* * * * * * * * *

"I never heard such nonsense—never!" cried Mrs. de Courcy Miles, regarding her niece with indignant eyes.

They were sitting in the study together about a week after the Professor's death. It was a cheerless February afternoon. Mrs. de Courcy Miles had ensconced herself in the professorial chair—it was the most comfortable one in the room—and had drawn it up close to the blazing

fire. So that in a sense she might be said to speak *ex cathedrâ*.

Gwendolen gave a little weary sigh as her aunt's ejaculation fell upon her ears. She had heard it at least fifty times before in the course of the last few days. (Mrs. Miles was a past-mistress in the art of 'nagging.') Then she went on with her task again. It was a sad task that she was engaged upon. She was looking through her dead father's private letters and papers—those sort of things which men are wont to hide away from every human eye, which they hardly ever look at themselves, but still keep by them—stray links in the chain of memory—sacred relics of the past. She came across many things—love-letters of her mother's, the ink dim and faded now, a lock of sunny brown hair, a faded photograph of a child—herself. This last proof of her dead father's love was too much for Gwendolen. She bowed her head, her eyes filled with tears.

Mrs. Miles watched her narrowly over the top of her *Court Journal*, which did duty as a fire-screen. Taking her niece's emotion to be a sign of weakness she renewed the attack.

"And people are beginning to talk already," she continued. "Only yesterday the Master of St. Bridget's asked me where your husband was, and I had to trump up some excuse. I said that his lungs were too delicate for him to leave the Riviera—and Belinda and Araminta both suspect there's something wrong. I am sure they do by the way they asked me about you yesterday,—I know that twinkle in Belinda's eye—and once let them get hold of the story it will be all over the place. A pretty tale indeed for them to gossip about! A wife of a month—and separated from her husband! Not that *I* care what they say, for I shall soon be away from the whole lot—thank goodness—but you, you ought to have proper respect for yourself, Gwendolen, and for your family.

Think how angry Lord Baltinglass must be, and just now too when his help would be so valuable to us. Not one of the Baltinglass family at the funeral. No wonder people smell a rat . . . . Do you hear what I say, Gwendolen?" queried Mrs. Miles sharply, with startling suddenness. "Why don't you answer me and not sit there like a wooden image?"

"I hear," replied Gwendolen in a low voice, without raising her head. (It would have been strange if she didn't, for Mrs. Miles was apt to become *crescendo* when excited). "I have nothing to add to what I have told you before. What you say about people talking makes no difference to me,—none."

"Then it ought to do so," retorted Mrs. Miles, incensed at this new proof of Gwendolen's obstinacy.

Suddenly she changed her manner; it might not be wise to press her niece too hard. So she adopted a high moral tone which sat upon her oddly, like a youthful make-up on a withered face.

"You are doing a very wrong and wicked thing, Gwendolen," she said. "A wife's first duty is to her husband. After all my careful training, you ought to remember that, I am sure."

"And has a husband no duty towards his wife?" asked Gwendolen with a faint ring of scorn in her voice.

"Certainly he has," rejoined Mrs. Miles briskly. "He should pay her bills and give her a liberal allowance and he should—there are many things he should do. And I am sure your husband, if only managed properly, would be the most generous of men. I wish *I* had him for a week," said Mrs. Miles sagely.

"He has wronged an innocent girl and deceived me," said Gwendolen in a dull flat voice, as though repeating a formula learned by rote. She had indeed whispered it to her truant heart many times these last few days.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Miles,

"I haven't common patience to listen to you. Innocent girl, forsooth! Some designing cat or other, I have no doubt. I daresay the creature feathered her nest well. I know the bold-faced hussies, I have seen them skipping about with Paris-made gowns, and diamonds big enough to make an honest woman turn green with envy. Where do they get them from I should like to know, if it isn't from our husbands and our lovers? They never give *us* such diamonds . . . . As to his deceiving you, why, if women were to demand a certificate of strict morality from the men they marry, they would never get husbands at all."

"Men expect it from their wives, or from the women who are to be their wives," replied Gwendolen harping on her old theme.

"It is not the same thing—quite different. I never heard such sentiments. They are absolutely indecent. Wherever you could have picked up such ideas from I don't know, not from *me*—that I am

sure of. I always told poor dear James he ought to have kept a tighter hand over you,—allowing you to read whatever you liked and running to Church all day and every day. This is what it has all come to," declared Mrs. Miles, fanning herself vigorously with the *Court Journal*.

"I need no Church to tell me what is right," said Gwendolen, looking at her aunt with a steady gaze. She looked very pale in her deep mourning dress. "I have followed the dictates of my own conscience and the sure guide of the Gospel."

"I do not wish to say anything against religion," Mrs. Miles rambled on, apparently addressing a distant chair. "I am a religious woman myself I hope,—all respectable women are religious—and as for the Gospel, I daresay it was quite suited to Jews and Gentiles and"—vaguely—"all those semi-barbarous heathen creatures, who lived such a long time ago. But it is hardly suitable for Society in the present day—in a literal sense, I mean."

"Evidently," said Gwendolen with a sigh.

Then she went on sorting her letters. There was a little pause, but it was only the lull before the storm.

"I can't think what your husband is about to let you go on like this," continued Mrs. Miles presently in an aggrieved tone. "Hasn't he written to you?"

"No," said Gwendolen, and she set her trembling lips. "I have heard nothing from him. I expect to hear nothing from him. Were he to write to me, I should return his letters unopened. I told him when we parted that everything must be over between us and he has taken me at my word."

Brave words these; but no one knew save herself the awful desolation in her heart, the eager longing for news of him, which she strove in vain to quell.

Mrs. Miles gave a contemptuous sniff.

"What a poor weak-minded creature he must be," she exclaimed, "to take a woman at her word. And I thought he was so fond of you! If I were your husband, I'd make you come back sharp enough, I warrant you."

"Would you force me to live under the same roof with a man who has led an immoral life?"

"Was there ever such an argumentative obstinate creature!" cried her aunt apostrophizing the ceiling. "I can't think where you get your obstinacy from I am sure. Not from *our* side of the family. Poor dear James was always amenable enough, I will say that of him. What you expect of a husband I don't know. You ought to go to India for a time, that would enlarge your ideas. Or you can look nearer home. Look at the Duchess of Puffeballe, for instance. How well she bears it, and everyone knows that the Duke has a perfect harem stowed away somewhere. That dear Creeper Crawley told me so. But the Duchess doesn't know, or rather

she pretends she doesn't know. And quite right too—a woman ought to stick to her husband, even if he were a regular Henry the Eighth."

To this diatribe Gwendolen made no reply. She had said too much already. To answer was to add fuel to the flame.

Mrs. Miles regarded her with compressed lips. The situation was becoming alarming, the girl must be brought to reason somehow.

"Perhaps you would be good enough to inform me," she said with crushing civility, "in the event of this separate establishment, what allowance your husband proposes to give you to maintain it with? As he apparently consents to the ridiculous arrangement, I hope it is a good one. It was a great mistake that there were no settlements. I told poor dear James so at the time, but he was always so unbusiness-like—as events have proved—and Lord Baltinglass seemed disposed to be so generous that I didn't like to press it."

Gwendolen started as if stung, a deep flush overspread her face.

"He makes me no allowance," she cried. "I would not touch his money—not one penny—it would burn me. I would rather starve."

"And starve you will, and serve you right too," said Mrs. Miles brutally. Mrs. Wilfrid Tyrconnel *plus* a handsome allowance, even if separated from her husband, might have been worth conciliating; Mrs. Wilfrid Tyrconnel penniless and at hopeless issue with the Baltinglass family certainly was not. "How do you propose to live?" she went on shrilly. "You know your father has died without a sixpence—bankrupt almost—I shall be surprised if there is enough to pay the creditors. We are only in the house on sufferance, I wonder the bailiffs are not in it at the present moment. It was shameful of James, that it was, to go and speculate all his money away like this, and not leave anything for me, not even the plate—I who

have kept his house all these years, and made such sacrifices for him too. And I pleaded with him—I did everything in my power to dissuade him from trusting that Coryton creature, who is now living on the fat of the land with our money. But he would not listen, the obstinate mule! And now I am left like this. Oh! it is shameful, *shameful!*"

Mrs. de Courcy Miles abandoned the *Court Journal* for her pocket-handkerchief and sought refuge in tears.

Gwendolen bent her head still lower. Alas! It was all true. Her poor father! He had been duped, deceived, ruined. She was penniless, and the man who had done all this was her husband's own familiar friend. Then a sense of the injustice done to the dead by her aunt's coarse words struck her.

"How can you speak so, Aunt?" she said indignantly. "You know that it was you who

advised poor father to entrust his money to Mr. Coryton. I heard you urge him to do so myself."

"You heard nothing of the kind," cried Mrs. Miles, now thoroughly roused. "It is a monstrous fabrication. But there, it is only what I might expect. Like father, like daughter—nothing but ingratitude. How do you propose to live, I should like to know? You are much mistaken if you think you are going to palm yourself off upon me. I have quite enough to do to keep myself—it's little enough I have, only the pension of a Colonel's widow. What a mercy your father couldn't get hold of that, or he would have squandered my little all too. No—carry out your absurd ideas and I wash my hands of you once and for all. Not one sixpence will you get from me. Again I ask, how do you propose to live?"

"I shall work," said Gwendolen, apparently unmoved by her aunt's wrath, "as many others have done before me; my wants are few."

She spoke with the quiet confidence of one who has never known what it is to want—never known what it is to work for a living—to seek work and not to find it.

"Work!" echoed Mrs. Miles with a scoffing laugh, jumping up suddenly from her chair. "What will you work at, I should like to know? What are you fitted for? An underpaid governess, a lady-help, or perhaps you'll take in plain sewing—like enough you won't even get that. People are not so fond of employing women who are separated from their husbands, I can tell you. It doesn't matter who's in the wrong, it is always the woman who gets blamed, and so you'll soon find out. The future Lady Baltinglass and plain sewing—it is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard of. If it gets into the Radical papers, it'll be enough to upset the House of Lords, that it will."

She paused a moment, breathless, glaring at

her niece. Gwendolen again took refuge in silence.

"I wash my hands of you," cried Mrs. Miles, retreating towards the door. I shall denounce you to Lord Baltinglass. I shall leave this horrid Cambridge to-morrow and go back to Kensington—dear Kensington, how I wish I had never left it!" Then, with startling inconsistency and a threatening of hysterics—"You ungrateful creature, if it hadn't been for you, instead of being hounded out of the house like this I might be living in luxury at Blarney. Never shall I forgive you, never! I wish, oh! how I wish your husband may drag you back to him by the hair of your head!"

And with this Parthian dart Mrs. Miles whisked out of the room, and slammed the door after her.

A few days later Gwendolen left Cambridge.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPROUTING OF THE BAY TREE.

Ce sont surtout les commencements qui sont charmants.
—La Rochefoucauld.

"You see we are so very poor," said Violet.

"You don't look it," rejoined Theodora bluntly, as she helped herself to another glass of claret.

They were sitting at lunch together in the well-appointed dining-room of the Corytons' nutshell establishment in Curzon Street. It was a pretty little room, pretty like everything else in this pretty little house. It had a dado of olive green running around the walls, a Smyrna carpet, tapestry

curtains, handsomely carved furniture of unpolished oak, half a dozen good pictures on the walls, three or four vases of Oriental ware on the mantelshelf, and the table with its white damask, silver, and bright-hued flowers setting off an excellent lunch. Everything betokened comfort, refinement, even luxury. But poverty?—No. Theodora was right. If appearances were to be trusted, Mr. and Mrs. Coryton were flourishing like the Green Bay Tree.

Violet manufactured a little sigh. It was her policy just now to pose as poor with her rich friends. People expected so much less of one. Besides everyone was 'poor' now. It was much better form.

"Poverty is a relative thing," she answered sweetly. "Of course Poley and I have enough to rub along with in a Darby and Joan sort of manner. But if Lord Southwark were not defraying Poley's election expenses, I really do not know how we should have managed them. Of course

we would do anything for the Cause, make any sacrifice, but West Southwark is such an expensive constituency to contest. We are so *very* grateful to Lord Southwark."

She said this with honeyed sweetness, hoping it would find its way round to the right quarter through the medium of Theodora.

"You needn't be then," said that young lady with characteristic frankness, "Lord Southwark's not the man to do anything without an object. He's only poppin' your husband in to keep the seat warm for Pimlico. He'll have to turn out when Pim's ready for it,—don't cher know?"

"Oh! of course," echoed Violet, with an inscrutable little smile. "We quite understand that. Still, I repeat, it is very, very good of Lord Southwark, to have put Poley forward."

"Well, I s'pose he could have run someone else," said Theodora with engaging candour. "There's Creeper Crawley for instance, he's a

useful person, or that man we met at Blarney, you remember? Wrigglesworth, was his name, wasn't it? the man with a bald head and a moustache like a dilapidated tooth-brush. He's a protégé of Sir Alway and Lady Sumtime Typsey, isn't he? You know whom I mean. By the way, talking about Blarney, do you ever hear anything of Wilfrid Tyrconnel or his wife by any chance?"

"Never," answered Violet with a little pout and a shrug of her shoulders.

"That's curious," said Theodora reflectively. "You used to be such pals, don't cher know. Poor Wilfrid! I'm sorry for him. Somebody told me,—Lauder Forbes I think,—that he was drivin' a hansom or somethin'. If so, I'm sorry for his fares, for Pigeon was never much of a whip. I wonder what's become of his wife too. She's livin' apart from him, I'm told—governessin' or somethin'. I wonder how long they'll keep it up. It's a great mistake to go on quarrellin' with your bread and butter."

So saying, Theodora helped herself to a slice of rein-deer tongue, "just to top up with," as she phrased it. She had a good healthy appetite and was not ashamed of it; there was nothing of the Lydia Languish about Theodora.

"I wonder what the row was about between them," she went on presently, pushing her plate aside with an air of satisfaction.

"I really do not know," replied Violet wearily. "I only know that poor Lord Baltinglass has been very angry about it. He has been abroad ever since March. It was a most unsuitable marriage. Poley did everything he could to prevent it. She was an utterly impracticable person and Wilfrid Tyrconnel was always very wild. Now that Poley's restraining influence is gone, I am afraid he has gone from bad to worse. Why, if you believe me, he has even quarrelled with Poley, his best friend, who sacrificed so much for him. I don't wonder at Lord Baltinglass being angry——"

"Humph!" ejaculated Theodora.

"But do not let us talk about them," continued Violet, not quite understanding this oracular utterance, "let us talk of something else."

"With all my heart," said Theodora. (One cannot waste too much time over unfortunate friends in Vanity Fair). "You haven't got such a thing about you as a cigarette, have you? Thanks. Got a light? Thanks awfully..... Well, what shall we talk about, the West Southwark Election? I s'pose that's what you wanted me to come to lunch for, wasn't it?"

"Well, of course I should like to know what you think my husband's chances are," said Violet, a little taken aback at this plainness of speech. "You see," she went on winningly, "you know so much about politics."

"I know a good deal about West Southwark. I should be a fool if I didn't, considering I've been workin' up a Habitation of the Primrose League

there, ever since that affair of Loose-Fyshe's first came out. Oh, we shall run our man in, not a doubt of it. Fyshe refuses to retire for any other Liberal Candidate, and the Nonconformist 'conscience,' as they call it, is dead against him. Your political Nonconformist can swallow a good deal, but this cream-tart business is a little *too* hot."

"Yes," said Violet drily, "Mr. Fyshe has committed the unpardonable sin, he has been found out."

"I don't agree with you at all," answered Theodora with uncompromising frankness. "At least, it don't strike me in that way," she went on flicking the ash from her cigarette, "I'm not over squeamish I hope, and I don't see what a man's private life has to do with his public career, though I wouldn't say so on a platform. Look at Napoleon and Nelson and all the rest of 'em. But there are some things which are not good form, and putting pepper into a cream-tart is one of, 'em to my thinkin'." And she tossed off a glass of Allasch.

"Yes, yes," said Violet wincing. She hated long tirades and Theodora's in particular. "By all means: I quite agree with you. And you really think Poley's chances are good? If only you and your splendid Primrose League will work for him, I am sure he must win."

"We shall pull him through," said Theodora, who, like most young women of her kind was not prone to underrate her own importance, "with the Primrose League and the Southwark influence, he's bound to head the poll. "We've got a meetin' of the Habitation to-morrow and I'm goin' to canvass from house to house every day next week. There's a great art in canvassin'. It's more important than speakin', if people would only realize it. You'd better come round with me. It'll do good if you show yourself and help the Cause, and then I can put you through your paces."

"That's awfully good of you," said Violet

enthusiastically. "I'll do anything, *anything* of course."

"Well, I must be off," said Theodora, jumping up in her usual abrupt manner. "I've promised to meet Pim at Tattersall's a little after three and have a look at a Park hack he's got his eye on for me. Where's my dawg? Oh, here he is," as a villainous looking bull pup emerged from beneath the table, where he had been sniffing round Violet's ankles much to her discomfort. But she had borne it like a Spartan. "He's a beauty, isn't he? A nose you could hang a bucket on. Come along, Bill. . . . ."

When Theodora had taken her leave, Violet went up to her room,—a cosy nest with white wood furniture and draperies the shade of a blush rose, to put on her things for a drive. She gave a little sigh of satisfaction as she looked around. Certainly the Professor's money had been laid out to a good advantage. Then she drew

on her gloves.—Violet's male friends kept her well supplied in gloves,—and tripped downstairs to the neat, well-appointed Victoria, which was waiting for her.

She had a good many things to do that afternoon, a lot of cards to leave and one or two At-Homes, for the season, precipitated by the coming General Election, was dying with a rush, and people were trying to cram everything into a week or two, that which should have been spread over a month. It was quite late before she got home, after a turn in the Park just to give her an appetite for dinner.

She found her husband busily writing upstairs in the little room, which he called his study.

He threw down his pen as she came in with a sigh of relief.

"That will do, I think," he said, gathering up the sheets of foolscap on which he had been writing his Election Address. "Read it over,

Vixie, and tell me what you think of it. It's not more packed with platitudes than the ordinary run of such documents, I suppose. There is the usual reference to dynamite and American gold and the infamy of smashing our grand old Constitution. I think that touch about Free Food will catch the Labour Vote and that phrase about the sanctity of domestic life the Nonconformists. What do you think?"

Violet looked over the sheets with a critical air.

"You have forgotten the 'Maintenance of true Religion,'" she said presently.

"Dear me, so I have. How stupid of me to forget it. Make a note of it, Vixie. Anything else?"

"There is no direct allusion to the Fyshe scandal," she said, tentatively. "Is the sentence about the sanctity of domestic life sufficient?"

"I think so. We will leave the women to do all the rest . . . Well then, I'll stick in that little

omission about religion and send it off to the printer. Lord Southwark will want to see the proofs, of course. To-morrow the campaign begins in earnest."

"And in three weeks' time," she exclaimed, throwing her arms around his neck, "I shall be the wife of a real live M.P. Oh! Poley. When it comes to be a question of reward for 'services to the party,' remember nothing less than a baronetcy will suffice. You must *not* take a knighthood like that wretched Cincinnatus Spread-eagle."

He returned her embrace in earnest, a smile lighting up the dark beauty of his face. They were really very fond of one another, these two.

"His was a prize for silence. I mean to make my voice heard I can tell you. Nothing less than an Under-Secretaryship will content me to begin with—I mean after my first Parliament."

"When Lord Southwark means you to make

way for Pimlico," reminded Violet with a little pout.

"Lord Southwark has forgotten that possession is nine points of the law. Once in, I am not going out again unless I am bought out with a safe seat elsewhere and something down on the nail. We know all about that, don't we, little one? But tell me what have you been doing all day?"

"I had that odious Theodora and her horrid dog to lunch. She and her ridiculous Primrose League will make themselves useful canvassing of course. Then I made some calls, and went on to Lady Lily Splashe's. She edits a society paper you know, and is going to put me in next week as one of the 'Beauties of To-day.' It all helps."

"I thought that was a question of buying five hundred copies at least," said Coryton, looking a little glum.

"Not to me, dear boy. I tell her all about the smart parties I go to,—from which she is tabooed

now, poor thing—and this and some puff-paragraphs are the return. 'Cutlet for cutlet', you know."

"You are a genius, Vixie," said her husband admiringly. "What else?"

"I have written your biography for Creeper Crawley's paper. You are to be the next in the series of 'People I have Known.' This is an age of advertisement, you know; there is nothing like logrolling. Cultivate the press agencies and subscribe to Romeike, that's my motto. By the way, he's coming here to dinner to-night—Creeper Crawley, I mean, not Romeike,—and so is Cincinnatus Spreadeagle. They are both to help you in the election in different ways. Dear me, it's half-past seven already! I must be off to dress."

CHAPTER VIII.

WEST SOUTHWARK.

> The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters,
> economists and calculators has succeeded.
>
> —BURKE.

THE fateful day of the West Southwark Election opened bright and encouraging. There is nothing so encouraging as a bright day, most of all in politics, and Coryton, Violet, and their chosen henchmen, as they drove down in two-horse victorias at cockcrow, were all in the highest spirits. Partly because they felt they were going to win and partly because it was such a relief to have

done with this tiresome electioneering at last.

The campaign had been wound up the night before with a crowded meeting, where Sir Cincinnatus Spreadeagle had discoursed, in his very best Yankee twang, on the irresistible vigour of British patriotism, and Mr. Toadey-Snaile M.P., amid the respectful silence due to so solemn a subject, had dealt with the sanctity of the home.

It had all been unanimous, enthusiastic, righteously indignant. And Coryton knew enough of politics to be aware that, though unanimous and even enthusiastic meetings never mean anything, yet when the free and independent turn up the whites of their eyes, they always mean business. Moreover, since that meeting Coryton had obtained his trump-card and there seemed no doubt that he had only to play it in order to win the game.

For the last ten days his agent had been telling him that the issue depended entirely upon the votes of some two hundred members of an Indepen-

dent Labour Club, who wanted the Government to take up the question of Free Food in the Board Schools. This grimy little club had become the pivot of the election and had acquired a totally disproportionate importance. The caucuses of both parties had tried to bully it, but it had snapped its fingers. The hack wirepullers had been sent down to parley and had received only a snubbing for their pains. Mr. 'Tutu' Falstaff had had the door slammed in his face and the Hon. Fitz-Marmaduke Brabazon had had his hat bashed in. Then Mr. Toadey-Snaile M.P. and Mr. Snorthorse, chief among wirepullers, had said, "Surely they will reverence us;" but even the visits of those magnates to the little club in Petticoat Lane, West Southwark, had been of no avail.

If the Government would pledge itself to bring in a 'Beer and Buns' bill, as it was popularly called, that Session, the Wat Tyler Club would vote solid for Mr. Coryton; if the Government

refused and the Old Parliamentary Leg would give a pledge, unqualified by his usual sesquipedalian parentheses, the Wat Tyler Club would vote solid for Mr. Loose-Fyshe. A pledge from Snorthorse or Toadey-Snaile would not suffice. No excuses were held to be satisfactory. It was a case of, no bill, no votes. What cared the Wat Tyler Club for the fact that the Conservative party was opposed to the bill on principle? What cared it for the fact that Mr. Loose-Fyshe was pledged up to the eyes against it? No bill, no votes!

Mr. Artful Cadger, President of the Wat Tyler Club, was inexorable. It was in vain that Coryton assured him of sympathy and objected that the Conservatives of West Southwark would not stand a pledge on the subject; in vain that he promised to support such a bill if someone else would introduce it. No bill, no votes!

So Coryton had an interview with the Prime Minister the day before, and now he had in his

breast-pocket a letter in that statesman's precise hand, which could not fail to brush away Mr. Cadger's last remaining scruples.

"We will bring in a bill," the Prime Minister had said, with an oracular smile, after listening in an amused paternal sort of way to Coryton's pleading, "we will bring in a bill, by all means, if the Wat Tyler Club insists. Just now that body is master of the situation."

"It is the key to the election," said Coryton, with a passable affectation of earnestness.

"And the election is the pivot of the empire," returned the Prime Minister sarcastically. "So, of course, we will bring in a bill. But whether we shall pass it," and he looked longingly towards his chemical laboratory, impatient to end the interview, "God bless my soul, that's quite another thing!"

Coryton laughed. "They'll expect you to resign if you don't pass it."

"They will, will they?" he returned gruffly, as he sat down to write the required letter.

The agent had wished Coryton to read the letter at last night's meeting, but Coryton had prudently preferred not to risk Conservative abstentions by such a course and had determined to communicate with the Wat Tyler Club only at the last moment. Every effort would be made to poll his own party early and, when there were as few as possible of them to risk alienating, he would go and make his terms with the mammon of the Wat Tyler Club.

He knew, since their last deputation to Mr. Fyshe, that they would certainly not vote for that statesman and that it was merely a question of producing the Prime Minister's letter and securing their votes at any time. With their votes the victory was assured and Coryton, as he drove down to Southwark in the early morning, felt that his first great ambition was virtually attained and

that he was on the threshold of a great career.

Never had Violet been in such spirits,—certainly never at that time in the morning.

"Do you know," she said to Mr. Toadey-Snaile, "I had been *dreading* this business of getting up in the middle of the night. I always agreed with Admiral Mauresk, who tells you, 'One always feels *frightfully ill* in the morning and then one gets gradually better and better all day, until by dinner time one is charming.' I used to think it was simply tempting Providence even to show oneself before luncheon. But somehow to-day at 6.30 a.m., I feel as sprightly and active and keen about things as a cheap tripper on a Bank Holiday."

"She's as beautiful as a butterfly,
And as proud as a Queen,"

trolled forth Mr. Toadey-Snaile with a slobbery leer.

"Is pretty little Sally Popkins,
Of Clerkenwell Green,"

Coryton hummed, completing the couplet.

Violet frowned slightly and changed the conversation.

"I wonder how early Theodora Gargoyle will turn up. She is going to drive a dog-cart ablaze with Poley's posters all day to bring up voters. She wanted it to be a tandem, but Pim persuaded her that rotten eggs would fidget the horses and, though she would not mind such things for herself, she was not going to risk them for her precious 'gees'."

The election passed off as most elections do. There was the usual display of activity at the various committee rooms, the usual demonstrations of party-spirit on the part of all the small boys in the constituency, and the usual amount of bribery, treating and intimidation under the rose. There was more than the usual amount of social splash, which is always imported into metropolitan elections beyond Jordan. With the Radical can-

didate it was a life or death struggle, and no effort had been spared to make an imposing show of every single one of his friends who still stuck to him. Admiral Mauresk had sent his carriage all the way from Dorking, and his son, 'Tiger,' was driving a van round all day bringing up voters. A number of French statesmen, as yet untainted by the breath of Panama, went the round of the committee rooms to impress the electorate. And late in the afternoon, when things were beginning to look black, the wife of the ex-Premier came down and drove rapidly three times round the constituency in a poke bonnet:—"as if the seat was to be captured like Jericho." said Sir Cincinnatus in comment, as he gulped down another brandy and soda.

On the other side the struggle was no less keen. The party felt that a victory in West Southwark meant a new lease of life and it took care to send all its soldiery into the field, from the light

skirmishers of the Primrose league in their smartest spring dresses to the heavy ordnance of the Beerage and the kept regulars of the working men's clubs. Never had such a display of posters and election literature been known, never had so much ingenuity been expended in devising telling cries. Before the early milkman had started on his rounds, the whole pavement of the constituency had been stencilled in large black letters with a command to 'VOTE FOR CORYTON AND THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT.' Before the postman had concluded the first delivery of letters, every street had an arrangement of banners, hung from one Radical window to another, proclaiming to the world that 'SOUTHWARK TRUSTS AND HONOURS FYSHE.' Before the workers had gone out for their dinner-hour, every wall and hoarding had the pictorial representation of a gigantic loaf with the legend 'VOTE FOR FYSHE AND CHEAP BREAD,' in subtle allusion to Coryton's supposed leanings towards Fair Trade.

Before the workers had returned to their work, Coryton's printers, at the suggestion of the astute Creeper Crawley, had pasted the additional words 'AND CHEAP WAGES' at the foot of the placards.

Towards tea-time the agents on both sides were cocksure of success, but Mr. Creeper Crawley, who knew more about elections than everybody else, shook his head gravely and said oracularly that he thought they now had a slight majority, but that he fervently wished that 'night or Blucher' would arrive. Blucher in this case was Mr. Artful Cadger, President of the Wat Tyler Club, whom Coryton had been vainly searching for during more than an hour.

The two hundred of Mr. Cadger's brigade had been spending the day at the Blue Badger tavern, watching each other like lynxes, determined that they would be bought or sold as one man. But Mr. Cadger was off on a secret mission to the Goat and Compasses and, in his absence, nothing that

Coryton could say or show had the faintest effect upon his followers. So Lord Pimlico and his van, Theodora Gargoyle and her gaudy dog-cart, Lady Elizabeth in a brougham, Mr. Blunder Cable with his drag and Violet on the box-seat beside him, waited outside to take them up to the poll as soon as they would come.

Meanwhile, Coryton dashed along in Lord Rupert Cameron's private hansom from one low public house to another, in search of the key to the situation, the 'Pivot of the Empire', as he told Mr. Cadger the Prime Minister had called him, when at last he found him in a half-drunken condition in the bar parlour of the Marquis of Granby. However, everything was accomplished all right; the Prime Minister's letter more than sufficed to turn the 'Pivot of the Empire'; and Coryton brought him back in triumph to the Blue Badger as fast as his hansom could scamper. Theodora gave a joyous view-halloo as they came in sight and the

other impatient amateur Jarveys joined in giving them a tumultuous ovation. The faithful two hundred needed but few words of persuasion from their chief, and soon they were driving down to perform their duties as citizens as fast as their aristocratic conveyances could carry them.

As soon as the poll was closed, everybody drove back to dinner at Lord Southwark's. Some were for going down to hear the poll declared at midnight from Southwark town-hall, but the majority preferred to await the pleasure of the telegraph wires. Everybody was unanimous in congratulating Coryton upon the splendid manner in which he had fought the election and especially upon the diplomatic talent he had shown in the suing and winning of Mr. Artful Cadger. Violet also came in for many pretty speeches, especially from the men, upon her cunning as a canvasser. Nor were compliments wanting to Theodora Merivale for her tireless efforts and success with her horses in a crowd.

When much-needed refreshment had put everybody in a more hopeful frame of mind, Lord Southwark asked Mr. Creeper Crawley across the table what he thought the majority would be.

"A close thing, my Lord, a very close thing," returned that oracle. "Thanks to the Blue Badger contingent, we have certainly won, but I shall be surprised if Mr. Coryton's majority exceeds 150."

Theodora whistled and offered to bet him six ponies to four that it would exceed 500, but Creeper Crawley only blinked benevolently and said he did not wish to take advantage of a lady's ignorance of electioneering matters.

"If Crawley is right," said Mr. Toadey-Snaile in his unctuous way, "our good friend Cadger will really have justified his claim to the title of 'Pivot of the Empire.' Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Creeper Crawley had not to wait long for the accuracy of his prediction to be justified, for within a couple of hours the electric wires were

throbbing through the country and beneath the seas with the news that a young and unknown man had defeated by the narrow majority of 179 votes a statesman, whom Europe had long been watching with anxiety.

When at last Coryton and his wife were alone, in the small hours of the next morning, their hearts were too full for many words. But as Violet turned up the lamp in their little sitting-room in Curzon-street and looked at her husband, she thought she had never beheld so victorious a visage. He seemed to hold himself more erect than was his wont, his eyes had a sparkle more brilliant than kohl, and his nostrils were dilated like those of a racehorse, which has just carried off the prize. She stood gazing at him fondly as he stood by the chimney, lost in thought. Then suddenly an irresistible impulse came over her. She placed her hands upon his shoulders and

looked up enthusiastically into his eyes exclaiming, "Poley! Poley! This is too good to be true. I am sure it must be some heavenly dream and presently there will be a knock at the door and I shall wake up to find that you are not an M.P. after all."

Coryton looked back tenderly into her eyes and said,

"Vixie, darling, this is the beginning of a great career. You and I together, my clever little girl, we are irresistible. There is nothing so high that it is out of our reach."

CHAPTER IX.

GRUB STREET, W.C.

'My life is one demd horrid grind.'
—C. Dickens: *Nicholas Nickleby.*

"Wot'll you 'ave for dinner to-day, sir?"

"I don't know. Anything. Whatever's least nasty."

"Let's see. Yer 'ad steak last night. Would yer fancy chawps to-day? Or p'r'aps" (this as an inspiration) "p'r'aps I might do yer some tasty little weal cutlets. Only weal comes expensive just now."

"Pray don't trouble to put such a tax on your imagination. I shall dine out to-day."

There was a discontented silence for nearly a minute.

"Then there's lunch and dinner to-morrer, which, bein' Sunday, 'as got to be thought on. I suppose yer'll be in to-morrer, won't yer, sir? for lunch and dinner."

"No. I won't be in to-morrow, for either lunch or dinner. I am sick of having nothing fit to eat. I can't stand it any longer. Leave me now. I am busy. I have a great deal of work to do and you keep on interrupting me. Leave the room, I say."

Tyrconnel's eyes filled with tears as his landlady bounced out of the room in a dudgeon, slamming the door after her. The room, as he looked round it wearily, was indeed enough to give anyone the blues, and he felt broken in health as well as sick at heart. The carpet was of the cheap 'Kidderminster' kind, which by the way is no longer made at all in the town of that ilk. It had a

great vulgar pattern of impossible flowers, such as nature, in her vulgarest moments, never dreamed of perpetrating, and it seemed to have been chosen with a view of presenting the utmost possible discord with the bird of paradise wall-paper, which once had been of the brightest aniline dyes, but now looked a strange medley of griminess and flaring bad taste, like an exhibit at the New English Art Club.

Some two feet above the level of the eye were a series of loyal and patriotic oleographs,—the death of Nelson, the wedding of Queen Victoria, and a portrait of a German princelet wearing the riband of the garter. Among them were three ordinary—very ordinary—dinner plates affixed to the wall by an arrangement of wire. On a side table was a ghastly erection of shells and mouldy birds and artificial grasses, protected from contamination by a bell-glass.

At a table in the centre of the room sat Tyrconnel,

with a blank sheet of paper and a new stock of pens and blotting paper before him. For a long time he sat with his elbows on the table and his hand pressed against his temples, vainly trying to think and only succeeding in starting fresh speculations about the infinite variety of stains and marks upon the scarlet cloth with the ornithological pattern.

He had suffered a great change since Monte Carlo. His face, which used to be rather cherubic in the old days, had acquired a pinched, angular look ; his cheek bones stood out prominently and there was a hectic flush upon them that boded no good. When he walked abroad, which he now only did for a specific object, men would often turn round in the street and whisper to each other. He now sat upon a hard, straight-backed chair, but his shoulders were rounded and he crouched over the table helplessly, and his mind kept wandering away to all sorts of sad, heart-breaking subjects. From

time to time he would make a stern effort to collect his thoughts. He would sit bolt upright, gasp for breath and make a feeble motion to move his shoulders back. He would take up a pen, dip it in the ink and poise it in the air just above his blank sheet of paper. But it was no use. The words obstinately would *not* flow and he had not the physical strength to remain sitting to attention.

As he sat there in the grey November gloom, he went over, in a sad retrospect, all that had happened to him since his wife's flight from Cannes six months ago.

The recollection of his last scene with her and of the staggering shock caused him by her abrupt departure from Cannes, without so much as a line or a message, was burnt into his soul. Every train of thought seemed to lead back to that catastrophe, and all the events that followed it had no more reality to him than a bad dream.

Most of that never-to-be-forgotten night had been spent pacing up and down the sitting-room, in an agony of self-reproach and despair too piteous for words. He had tried to reason with himself, to find, if possible, some ray of hope for a happy future, but when the cold grey dawn came through the Venetian blinds and woke him from a restless stupor that had overtaken him on the sofa, it brought no relief to his perplexities. He knew Gwendolen's unbending obstinacy too well to believe that anything short of a miracle could alter it. And without Gwendolen life must be a blank to him. He had felt the restraints imposed by her stern code irksome at times, but now that she was absent, every trifle reminded him of her and added fresh torture to the wound. What would become of him? To whom should he turn? God help him, he did not know. The day wore on until the short Cannes twilight was upon him, and he scarcely stirred. He sank into

a sort of lethargy and remained in one position hour after hour, staring blankly into space.

All of a sudden the mood changed and a great craving for action came over him. He paced the sitting-room and poured himself out a stiff tumbler of brandy and soda. A telegram from Coryton was on the table, saying he and his wife would come over to lunch on the morrow, but he turned from it in disgust. How could any such mere mundane detail interest him now? How could he endure the superficial condolences, the veiled sneers, the idle gossip of those butterfly friends? To-morrow! He would be hundreds of miles away by then. Cannes was alive with memories. He would hasten away—anywhere. If he could not hope to rejoin his wife, he could at least escape from this torture.

No sooner said than done. When he was in this mood, he always acted on impulses. Bradshaw was hastily dragged out. Just time, by

Jove! A bag and a portmanteau were packed. The landlord was paid his bill and told to have the rest of the luggage done up and sent home by *petite vitesse.*

Within an hour Tyrconnel was installed in a lit-salon, with his nose towards the North. He felt feverish, his head ached with great throbs and there was a numb pain in his chest which he had never known before. But he felt also a keen sense of relief, as if he had just passed through an agony and was weak and prostrate after it.

At last he was off. The familiar stations flashed past, the familiar names were bawled out sonorously, but it was all one to him. He did not get out once, he refused all proffers of food, all the way to Calais. The conductor was sent again and again for brandy, but it had no more effect on him than upon a man in whom poison has begun to work.

After Lyons there was snow everywhere, a

soulless waste of white as far as the eye could reach in all directions, and a great chill came over him, extending from the heart to the frail, shivering body. He wrapped himself more closely in his furs, he drew forth fresh rugs from the straps, but nothing could drive away the chill from his broken heart.

Something brought Coryton into his thoughts and he half regretted that he had not waited to see him. Coryton was a good fellow and had seen him round many a difficult corner before now. But no! That sleek, smiling face would have been maddening in the midst of a great grief. Violet Coryton? She was a sympathetic little thing and her presence could not have failed to be soothing. But how could she understand? Strong feelings, the sorrow of a lifetime would be about as intelligible to her as Coptic. He was best alone. Alone! Yes, indeed. He had not a single real friend,—no one to whom he could open his stricken heart now.

The train rattled on through the snow and darkness and seemed to snort mockingly as it forged ahead towards the unknown. The channel crossing was a fearful one, all the more fearful in the miserable cockle-shell of a boat, which the company seems always to select in connexion with the more expensive services of trains. Tyrconnel, who at the best of times was a bad sailor, learned all the bitterness of the valley of the shadow of death. As Miss Connecticut once expressed it, 'to begin with he was afraid he was going to die, and then he became much more afraid that he was not going to die after all.'

At the end of the journey he just had energy enough to tell his cabman to drive to some lodgings in Curzon-street, kept by old servants, where he had often spent an odd week in the old days, when his father's house was shut up or it was convenient for some other reason. They welcomed him effusively but regretted more than they could

say that they had not a crevice in the whole house to spare, and the best they could suggest was a house they knew of in Half-Moon-street hard by.

There he obtained two dreary little rooms on the second floor at the exorbitant rent of four guineas a week, and took to his bed at once. During three days he was delirious, and the doctor for a time feared for his reason. It never occurred to anyone to send for his relations and he remained there, at death's door, badly nursed, without a friendly face beside him, left to die like a dog in a ditch.

Thinking it over now in his Bloomsbury lodgings, he wondered how he had managed to survive that period of physical and mental torture. He clenched his fist and rapped the greasy table with it, cursing a malevolent Providence that had brought him through. And yet he was glad that he had not died then, for, while there was life, there was ever a lurking hope that he might see Gwendolen once more.

It was that hope, amounting almost to a fixed idea, which had buoyed him up through it all, and a deep intense longing came over him and shook his slender frame. He would see her! He must see her! But how? But when? He buried his face in his hands and swayed to and fro with impotent desire.

It was some months now since his delirious fever, but the delirious yearning was no whit less strong upon him. And yet he had had plenty of worries to distract his thoughts. As soon as he was well enough, he had written to his father and his aunt, telling them the whole story, and more than the whole sad story, in a torrent of self-reproach.

Never very good at lucid expression, he could now, in his weak half-hysterical condition, only put together a rambling inconsequential narrative, which exaggerated every wrong on his part and left out every extenuating circumstance. The

natural inference, as far as any inference was possible from his ravings was that, before his honeymoon was a month old, he had left his wife at Cannes and gone off to Monte Carlo with some syren, whom he now denounced with ridiculous violence; that, when Gwendolen complained, he had told her brutally that the same code of morals was not to be expected from a man as from a woman; that he had abused her, ill-treated her, made her life a burden to her, and that she was obliged to leave him; that she had gone out into the snow; that he did not know where she was and that it was useless to inquire; that he was very, very unhappy and needed sympathy; that he had no friends left in the world save his father and his aunt and that he implored them, in God's name, not to forsake him in his distress.

Lord Baltinglass, who had not a particle of sentiment in his composition, made short work of this tirade.

"By your own showing," he wrote, "you are a fool as well as a scoundrel. Your wife was not the one that I should have chosen for you, as I naturally thought that the future Lord Baltinglass of Blarney might have looked somewhat higher, but as you said your happiness was at stake, I gave way and you married a girl, who, if not rich or nobly born, was at any rate sweet and good and beautiful and, what is more, entirely devoted to your weak and wicked self. Now, as far as I can gather from your badly expressed letter—which is more worthy of a hysterical school-girl than of a Harrow and Cambridge education—you have already insulted her virtue and innocence with a vulgar intrigue. You have treated her so badly that she has been forced to run away and claim the protection of her relatives almost before your honeymoon was over. And now you don't seem to care a snap what may have happened to her, or show any desire to make amends. You

simply come whining to us for sympathy with your weakness and wickedness. I blush to think that a son of mine should have acted in such a dishonourable and unmanly way. You will get no sympathy from me until you come to a right sense of your position and are reconciled to the wife you have injured. You seem to think of nobody at all but your contemptible self, neither of me nor of her. Have you so little to thank me for that you do not consider the injury to me such a scandal must cause if it got into the papers? My sympathy? No, nor my money shall you have until you make full amends for your wrong-doing. From this day forth your allowance ceases. Not a sixpence of mine shall go towards your shameless career of profligacy. Perhaps that will help to bring you to your senses, as neither warnings nor stern experience seem to have any effect upon you. We shall see. Meanwhile I decline to see you or have any communication whatever with

you, until I am assured that you have turned over a new leaf. Your sorrowful Father, BALTINGLASS."

Miss Tyrconnel wrote in quite as uncompromising a tone, though with less lucidity. After the shock given him by his father's letter, Wilfrid's heart sank within him at the prospect of wading through the twelve blurred pages, crossed and recrossed, in which his aunt delivered herself of her reproaches. She began with a biographical sketch of her nephew, dwelt upon the many merits of her system of juvenile education and his ingratitude in belying them, and launched off into more or less inappropriate quotations from the Bible about undutiful children and the way of transgressors. Then, like an old seven-volume novelist, she took Gwendolen in the same way; traced her parentage and education, pointing out the connexion between her amenability as a child and her present state of grace; held forth upon the soundness of her doctrines and their usefulness as consolation

in time of calamity. From this she drifted into a tirade against the wickedness of unbelief, and the yet greater enormity of misbelief, until Tyrconnel really began to think he must be a heathen and a savage as well as a criminal and a hysterical girl.

"You are treading the broad way," she said in conclusion, "that leadeth unto destruction. There can be no hope for you, either in this world or that which is to come, until you recognize your sin and turn unto the Lord. You have recognized your sin I hope and think, but have you turned unto the Lord? Have you laid your burden upon Him? It has been my prayer night and morning that you might see the error of your ways and turn your heart unto the wisdom of the just. Until you do this, until I have full proof of your conversion, I cannot intercede for you with your father, now justly incensed at your conduct; for until you are converted I can have no assurance

that you will not be a backslider at the first onset of Satan."

These letters had precisely the contrary effect upon Wilfrid Tyrconnel to that which his well-intentioned relatives had designed. Instead of bringing him to his knees by their severity, they stung him by their injustice and awoke the obstinacy, which was so deeply ingrained in his character. They acted as a fillip to his self-confidence, which had lately been almost crushed out of him by adversity. He had no friend in the world! His own father turned against him! His allowance was withdrawn.

Very well. He would show them all that he could get on admirably without friends. He would make his cantankerous father understand once for all, that he was not dependent upon the charity that he chose to dole out. He was not a fool, nor a cripple; he had a good headpiece and a sturdy pair of hands. Why should he not

earn his own living and snap his fingers at them all? People are always more inclined to do you a service if they know that you have no vital need of it. When he had achieved prosperity on his own account, they would all be on their knees to him and it would be for him to dictate his own terms. His father would come to him and 'humbly bring pieces of silver' and Gwendolen too, like the rest of them, would bow her head to the risen sun.

She took too much upon her, silly girl, but when he had trampled upon his enemies and his false friends and was in the flowing tide of prosperity again, she would recognize that he had been right after all. Would she?—He stopped himself in the torrent of indignation and wounded vanity. No, no. Gwendolen was not like that. His fair-weather friends would no doubt be veered round to him again by a triumph of this sort, by the proof that he was self-sufficing. Coryton, with

whom he was now *en délicatesse*, would fawn upon him all the more and make fresh proffers of doing dirty work; Williams and Wilmot and the rest of them would treat him with a respect, which they had never feigned; and his father's commercial instincts would be flattered by a proof of worldly wisdom after his own heart.

But Gwendolen was not like that. It would be as ridiculous as it was unjust to speak of her in the same breath with worldliness or material considerations. She was one of those rare few, of whom it could really be said otherwise than as a figure of speech, that she would rather starve than swerve one hair's breath from what she thought to be her duty. If he made a million in a week, saved the country from invasion, or were appointed Prime Minister to-morrow, he knew full well that it would not prepossess her one iota in his favour. Alas! he feared that she was indeed lost to him, if not even success could

pave his way back to her heart. Still, he contended, eager to see wisdom in the course of action he had decided to pursue, success would give him a foothold from which to approach Gwendolen. That canting old aunt, for instance, would be among the first to make her peace with him and she would be an invaluable ally for arguing with Gwendolen in her own line of country. And Mrs. de Courcy Miles would nag for him till she was blue in the face, if he could make any show of worldly prosperity. So true is it that 'to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath.'

Having made up his mind, the difficulty was how to put the resolve into execution. He had always had the profoundest contempt for poor devils, who profess themselves anxious for honest work but declare they can't find any, who are for ever proclaiming their readiness to do 'anything', but who all the while mean by the phrase that

they are capable of doing nothing. But when he came to consider the matter from a personal point of view, it was not so easy to see where the bread and butter was to come from, to say nothing of short cuts to wealth. He could not dig. He knew nothing of business,—nor even of finance. His pride debarred him from dependent or semi-menial employment, such as a secretaryship or tutorship. The unexpectedness and urgency of the situation made any of the so-called learned professions out of the question. So like most persons in a similar plight, he drifted into journalism, with the mistaken idea that it was the high road to affluence and influence, and that it was compatible with independence, self-respect, and even common honesty.

He had abilities above the average and had acquired a varied, if desultory education. He might be said to know a little about everything, though not everything about one thing, as somebody

or other advised young men to do. But he had never read books from the point of view of one who may have to write them and, though he could criticize, he could not create. Still less had he acquired the technique of writing articles, the art of dressing up commonplaces to fill the *rôle* of oracular verities, the word-juggling that passes current for epigram, nor the affectations that stand sponsors for originality of style. Moreover, he was handicapped with principles and a soul of his own, and felt a great repugnance towards hiring out his pen as an advocate hires out his tongue.

He had begun by writing solemn, heavy articles on solemn, heavy subjects, fortified by research in the British Museum and an array of classical quotation. The style was as pedantic as Dr. Johnson, as unintelligible as Carlyle, and as inconsequential as Ruskin. Conceive a thousand volumes of the *Quarterly Review* rolled into one and you

have a faint idea of the heaviness of the treatise he began by sending off to a weekly journal, which prided itself upon its sparkling modernity.

It was a very laborious business grinding out his articles, and he scarcely accomplished more than one, some three thousand words in length, each week. They were not without cleverness; they were infinitely polished; they had certain touches of character, which, properly dished up, would have been applauded as original. But he did not know the grooves, to which editors are accustomed; he had no discrimination about the style and subjects suitable to each paper; and he would never stoop to adapt his writing to the audience he had in view. Here it was, the best he could do. If they didn't like it, let them do without it and he would offer it elsewhere. They must take it or leave it, hoity-toity, confound it all!

The result was, that they did leave it. He plodded

on and sent off neat bundles of manuscript by registered post to various editors with polite notes and stamps 'for return if unsuitable.' Sometimes the editor kept the stamps and destroyed the manuscript; at other times, strangely conscientious, he returned it with a printed formula, expressive of compliments and thanks. Then Tyrconnel would write another polite little note, enclose more stamps and post his parcel off by registered post to some other editor. No article was ever accepted, but each eventually found its way to some editorial wastepaper basket and was lost, for he never kept a copy of his work.

After his father had stopped his allowance, Tyrconnel had realized the necessity of minute economy and, though of all things the idea was most distasteful to him, he determined to grapple with it. At his marriage his father had made no settlement upon him but, while fixing a very liberal allowance, had given him to understand

that he might draw upon him to any extent within reason.

The result had been that Tyrconnel never kept any accounts nor troubled about keeping any particular balance at his banker's. When Gwendolen had interfered with his enjoyment of Paris during the honeymoon, it was not from any need of economy, but because she considered it sinful to waste money on mere physical pleasures. His losses at Monte Carlo and Sally's requirements had, however, made a large hole in what remained of his last quarter's allowance and, after paying his bill in Half-Moon-street he found he was only worth some fifty pounds in the world.

This did not, however, greatly take him aback. He had a notion, like most people who have never tried it, that economy is perfectly easy if you only make up your mind to cut your garment according to your cloth. Fifty pounds he was sure would last a long time with proper

precautions, certainly much longer than it would be necessary to wait until he could be earning his living. His first idea of proper precautions was to remove to what is known as 'a cheaper neighbourhood.' On the theory that what ought to be, is, most people are firmly convinced that dirty, badly furnished accommodation in a squalid, remote or unfashionable part of London is necessarily very much cheaper than to live in cleanliness and comfort in Saint James's or Mayfair.

There can be no greater delusion. Each neighbourhood has its cheap and its extortionate, its miserable and its comfortable, its pretentious and its commonplace accommodation, whether it be houses, flats, or apartments.

The lodging-house fiend is the same everywhere: *coelum non animum mutat*, when he changes from Park-street, Grosvenor-square to Park-road, Regent's Park, from Bayswater to Belgravia. The only difference is that you are very much more

uncomfortable in the more barbarous parts and that anything you may save in the way of rent is more than counterbalanced by the addition to your cab-fares.

This Tyrconnel soon found out and he saw his fifty pounds melting away much faster than he liked. As we have seen, with the best will in the world, he often broke down under the sordid discomfort of bad food and filthy surroundings. That meant going out to a restaurant—first his old haunts in Regent-street and Piccadilly, then nasty Italian eating-houses in Oxford-street and the Strand, where he scarcely fared better than at home. And that meant spending more money.

Still he did not lose heart but persevered with his writing, flattering himself that, as soon as one article was accepted, he would catch the knack of the business and get into the swim straight away.

One afternoon he met Creeper Crawley in the Strand, who being ignorant of his quarrel with his father, greeted him with great effusion.

Inspired by this cordiality, Tyrconnel began to discuss journalism with him volubly.

"My dear Tyrconnel," said Creeper Crawley with some surprise and a trifle less enthusiasm, "you're on the wrong tack altogether. It's not a question of doing good work; it's a question of nobbling editors. You should never, *never*—do you hear, *never*—write an article unless it is accepted in advance and even then only if you know for certain that the editor isn't a bigger liar than most of them. I am sorry I can be of no use to you. You should go and call on the Editor of *The Morning Pump.* Tell him you're the son of Lord Baltinglass and are going to stand for Parliament, and that you will be glad to do him a series of leading articles on the financial stability of the agricultural labourer."

"But I don't know anything about the agricultural labourer."

"All the better. You'll be able to approach the subject impartially. Failing him, I should go and see Cincinnatus Spreadeagle. He runs a rag subsidized by the party and would no doubt be delighted to share the pickings with you."

Next day Tyrconnel walked wearily down to the Strand and, after much inquiry from its discourteous frequenters, found his way at last to the offices of *Britain*, where Sir Cincinnatus Spreadeagle presently received him in a small and grimy editorial room. He looked curiously at his visitor and mentally noted the falling off in smartness and assurance, now only too evident in Wilfrid Tyrconnel. With the instinct of his kind, the editor altered his tone correspondingly. The unctuous welcome, which he had prepared when he received Tyrconnel's card, died away unuttered on his lips. He did not rise from his seat, but

airily motioned the young man to a hard chair by the wall, saying unsympathetically,

"Well, Tyrconnel, what can I do for you? I'm a busy man, as you see."

Tyrconnel had no fight left in him to resent this insolence, but asked meekly,

"I—I wanted to know whether you'd take a few articles from me."

"Sorry I haven't much space to offer you. Most of our articles are done in the office. But if you care to send in anything, I'll give it my best consideration."

This was not very encouraging, but Tyrconnel was sufficiently desperate to persevere, and he went on to suggest various subjects for articles. Sir Cincinnatus pooh-poohed most of them, saying laconically that they had been done before. Then he rose and terminated the interview unceremoniously, saying,

"You must excuse me now. Send anything you like."

"What do you pay for articles?" stammered Tyrconnel uncomfortably as he fumbled for his hat.

Sir Cincinnatus's face grew even more unsympathetic than usual.

"I'm afraid we subsist mostly on voluntary contributions," he said with a brutal laugh; "but surely you haven't come down to penny-a-lining? I'll tell you what, though," he added after a pause. "If you want to make a few half-crowns, you can do me some bright pars on topical subjects. There's that fellow Coryton, for instance,—rising man, I'm told. You used to know him, didn't you? Knock me up a few spicy pars about him..... What, won't you?" he exclaimed in surprise, seeing that Tyrconnel had taken his hat and was making his way down the perpendicular staircase without a word. "Well, well, penny-a-liners mustn't be choosers. That'll teach me not to try philanthropy again in a hurry, if it's all the thanks I get for trying to do a poor beggar a good turn."

CHAPTER X.

THE CROWN OF BAY LEAVES.

To be famous when you are young is the gift of the gods.

—B. Disraeli: *Tancred.*

Behold, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed.

—Oxenstiern.

"'Tis the critical debate of the session," said the Prime Minister musingly.

He was sitting astride a hard cane-bottomed chair in the Whips' room; Lord Southwark sat on the table and dangled his legs uncomfortably; Creeper Crawley and the Whips were ranged uneasily

against the wall. Meanwhile Lord Rupert Cameron lay stretched at full length on the one sofa, which the room contained, lazily puffing the blue smoke of his cigarette towards the ceiling.

"The only critical part about it," said Lord Rupert grumpily, "is how those ten labour beggars are going to vote. If they support the bill, we are in a majority; if they vote against it, we are spoofed."

"What do they want?" asked Lord Southwark, with an affectation of ignorance.

"Payment of members out of the secret service fund," came a gruff voice from the sofa.

"Have you made out what they want, Crawley?" the Prime Minister asked, ignoring the voice from the sofa.

"It's the 'Beer and Buns' clause, my Lord. They supported us on the second reading of the bill, because we went in for free breakfasts in Board schools as well as the free education, which was all the old man would promise them. Now

Snorthorse is going to give them the support of the opposition for a clause to provide free Beer and Buns for Board school children at eleven o'clock every morning."

"Oh! for an hour in the House of Commons!" sighed the Prime Minister to himself.

At this moment the penetrating ping of the electric bell sounded through the lobbies, into the library and the smoking-room and on into the room of the Conservative Whips, where it roused Lord Rupert Cameron with a start from the snooze he had been feigning during Creeper Crawley's explanation.

"Speaker's in the chair," he growled as the Whips trooped off to attend to their quarries; "now the job'll be to get him out again."

It was not to be one of those show debates, when country cousins come up 'to hear the old man speak' and members with slender majorities devote long profitless hours to balloting for seats

in the strangers' gallery for their constituents. Yet there was something of that electric feeling in the air, which betokens a government crisis, and opinions were pretty evenly divided in the lobby as to whether the government would survive the motion to go into committee on the Free Food and Education Bill. The subject had aroused a certain amount of interest in the country, rather because it concerned the life of the government and the prospects of a dissolution than for any concern about the provisions of the bill. Mr. Beer Hardup had given notice of an instruction to the Committee on the subject of free beer and buns; Mr. Grit, the one respectable labour member, had undertaken to second him and it was rumoured that he would receive the support of the whole official opposition, excepting the late Prime Minister and a few of his colleagues of cabinet rank, who would shirk responsibility by leaving the House without voting.

At the period I speak of the country was governed by an Opportunist party, which had usurped the name without acquiring the reputation of the ancient Tory party. With that Government the gilded goal was permanency in office; the only notion of statecraft to purloin and exaggerate the measures of the Opposition; and the only passport to their good graces was a nodding acquaintance with the Spirit of the Age. It is now so long since the country has known a real Tory party or beheld high principles in any party that it may well be excused for agnosticism about all political virtue. After the betrayal of the country party by Peel in 1856 and their yet more shameful betrayal by their own leader in 1868, how could any sane man ever repose confidence in a party leader again?

This at least was what the Tory Cave of Adullam was now muttering in the lobbies and the clubs. Their strength and their determination

no man knew, not even the omniscient Whips with their hundred eyes. But the fact of their discontent was no longer a secret. The Whips were beginning to get frightened. And, when the Whips get frightened, the Ministry has to cast about for concessions. The difficulty about concessions just now was that two groups wanted them in conflicting directions and that unless both were satisfied, the bill could not pass.

The Cave's view of Toryism was what Harold Gaverigan, now a high-and-dry Tory candidate for a north-country constituency, was urging upon Coryton, from a privileged seat under the gallery. Coryton was shrugging his shoulders in his inimitable way and had begun his stock formula of inquiry, "Principles! What are they?" preliminarily to answering himself with a choice epigram, when the door-keeper crept up along the narrow gangway below the bar of the House and handed him a card bearing the name of Mr. Artful Cadger.

"Principles," said Coryton, rising to depart. "are the bastards of Conscience and derive their complexion from the keeper—for the time being—of that lady of catholic tastes. Here is the card of the keeper of my conscience, so I must be off. See you again. Ta-ta!"

"A conscience is a very useful servant but a hard mistress," said Gaverigan with a smile which remained on his lips as he watched the other start off down the gangway, bow to the Speaker with more than the carelessness of an old member and disappear among the little knot of persons standing just inside the door of the chamber.

It was question time, and the House had not filled yet, but the lobbies were full and animated, with the sort of buzz of expectation and speculation, which hovers about a racecourse before a big event.

"I've seen two or three members of the

Cave," Sir Cincinnatus Spreadeagle was saying oracularly to an admiring audience, consisting of the staunch Blunder Cable and the faithful Plantagenet-Unkels, who had come up all the way from Balham to hear the debate. "I've seen two or three members of the Cave just now in the lavatory and I am convinced they mean mischief."

"Pish!" said Toadey-Snaile, whose business it was always to overhear everything. "They've swallowed the free breakfasts. It's all rot to say they'll strain at the Beer and Buns clause."

"You don't mean to say the Government's going to accept that clause?" gasped Blunder Cable, feeling uncomfortable about angry meetings of rate-payers among the free and independent of Hounslow and half wishing he had not pledged himself so uncompromisingly against the principle of free food.

"Not a doubt of it," returned Toadey-Snaile, who had reasons of his own for wishing to know

how the other would take such a determination on the part of the Government.

"Well, they mean mischief," Sir Cincinnatus Spreadeagle interrupted him with tiresome iteration, "they vow they have principles, protest that there are other considerations beside party, are not prepared to swallow anything——"

"In the same generous way that Sir Cincinnatus is," said Toadey-Snaile with a mock bow, completing the sentence for him and passing on into the House.

Coryton stopped for a few moments to talk to Mr. Holloway Pother, who was on his way to talk to Gaverigan under the gallery. "Well, Mr. Pother," said Coryton in the hearty manner he always adopted towards people reputed to be genial, "what do you think of the Stale Buns clause?"

"Eh! dearie me!" said the venerable Free Trader, stroking one of his chins and screwing up

his eyes merrily, "is that what you call it? Well, to tell you the truth, I am in rather a fix about it. I've spent two hours in the library over Cobden's works, trying to make out what would have been his view on the subject. But such a thing was never contemplated in his day and I can't find anything to guide me. If it weren't for the Temperance people, I should be inclined to support it. But good beer's so hard to get nowadays. One doesn't know what to say."

Coryton passed on to the outer lobby, where a policeman called out his name in stentorian tones for the edification of a line of strangers, who looked very weary with the long waiting that is always exacted of those who come to visit their legislators in the chamber, probably to impress them with the busy and important character of the place. Among the strangers Coryton recognized Mr. Rupert Clifford, who had come to ask an Irish member to present a petition against the Act of

Settlement. He had only time to nod to the modern Jacobite before Mr. Cadger advanced to claim his attention.

That gentleman seemed somewhat awed by his surroundings, in spite of the assurance conveyed by a tight-fitting frock-coat and a brown bowler hat, not to mention a selection of paste-diamond rings which he wore outside his bright yellow gloves. The process of waiting and the insolence of the police, which would have irritated Mr. Cadger anywhere else, served to impress and subdue him in these lofty halls, whose atmosphere of sham antiquity has often served to overawe many a more hardened patriot than even Mr. Cadger. Coryton took him aside into the lobby which leads to the strangers' refreshment bar and they sat down together on a leather seat facing a picture of Monk declaring for a free parliament.

Mr. Cadger wanted a great many things.

In the first place he wanted a pledge that

Coryton would vote for the Beer and Buns clause, and he began to bluster a good deal when his representative coolly informed him that he should be guided by events. Mr. Cadger talked of pledges; Mr. Coryton replied that courtship was a period of greater freedom and less responsibility than matrimony. Mr. Cadger hinted at a vote of censure in the Wat Tyler Club; Mr. Coryton indulged in generalities on a member's duty to his constituents as a whole. Mr. Cadger swore that the President of the Wat Tyler Club was not to be trifled with; Mr. Coryton threw out mysterious hints at other means of meeting his constituent's desires.

In the second place Mr. Cadger wanted money. He was Treasurer as well as President of the Wat Tyler Club and the club's finances were now at low water mark. The club wanted a billiard-table and some additions to its cellars. Would Mr. Coryton contribute fifty pounds towards them?

Well then, five and twenty? Surely that was not too much to ask after all the club had done to secure his election! Coryton flung the man the stock phrase about the stringency of the Corrupt Practices Act, as one might fling a bone to a dog, but Mr. Cadger's sense of justice was outraged.

"You ain't spoke to me like that," he protested, "when you druv me from the Markiss o' Granby to the Blue Badger on the day of the 'lection. I said that letter you showed me were all werry foine an' that in course we was patriots an' all that koind o' thing, but that we was pore men an' 'ad ter think on ourselves fust. An' you sez, sez you, that were quite roight. An' I sez, 'Now come, deal fair with me and oi'll deal fair with you; wot'll yer stand us if we gits yer in?' An' you sez, 'B'leev' me, Mr. Cadger, yer'll not foind me backurd in doin' the 'andsome thing, if yer gits me in.' Well now, we '*ev* got yer in, an'

if yer calls yerself a gentleman yer won't go back on yer word now. Wot me an' moy mates wants ter know is, *are* yer or are yer not goin' to do the 'andsome boy us naöw? Yes or no?"

Mr. Cadger was raising his voice unpleasantly loud and Coryton could see the ill-favoured eyes of Mr. Beer Hardup watching him curiously from the lobby. So he smiled his most bewitching smile and said in his most dulcet tones,

"My dear Mr. Cadger, you must not let your imagination run away with you like that. Of course I mean to treat you handsomely. How could anyone treat so fine a fellow otherwise? I have to be running off to the debate in a moment, but I cannot deny myself the pleasure of offering you some slight refreshment after your walk."

"Refreshment be damned!" said Mr. Cadger curtly; "a foiver's the werry least as'll satisfoy me. Come now" (whining), "yer won't be so

'ard on a pore man as to refuse 'im a foiver arter all 'e's done for yer."

"I am sorry you won't take any refreshment," replied Coryton, without turning a hair. "I must be leaving you now, as the debate has begun. Let me know if I can serve you at any time."

"Serve me! I'll serve yer in a way yer won't like," growled Mr. Cadger between his teeth.

But Coryton was already lounging back through the lobby, as unruffled as possible. He exchanged another word with Mr. Rupert Clifford, who was still waiting for his Irish member, and then made his way up to the ladies' gallery, where Violet, with Lady Elizabeth Gargoyle, Theodora and Lady Giddy, had secured the best seats in the front row by the cage. Questions were just over, and the Vice-President of the Committee of the Council had got through the opening sentences of his speech.

He was aware, he said, that great diversity of opinion existed as to the details of this Bill, not

only among honourable gentlemen opposite, where diversity of opinion was chronic, but also among his honourable friends, where it was almost unknown. However, he hoped that by a little timely concession he would be able so to modify the bill that it might commend itself to all sections of the House. This, it appeared, he proposed to do by a compromise, which, like most compromises, only served to alienate everybody.

The Tory Cave had consented, after much pressure from the Whips, to vote for a bill embodying free breakfasts, but they had protested—and, what is more, meant it,—that nothing on earth should induce them to concede another iota. The Independent Labour Party, on the other hand, had protested, with equal emphasis and in less measured language, that nothing less would satisfy them than free beer and buns at eleven also. They vowed they marvelled at their own moderation in not demanding more.

When therefore the Minister coolly proposed a compromise which would increase the breakfasts but not provide a second meal, he only succeeded in exasperating the Tory Cave, which had already gone beyond the limits laid down by their conscience, while he provided the Labour Party with the excuse they desired for refusing the gifts that came from the Greeks. There were murmurs from below the Ministerial gangway, which kept increasing in intensity and volume as the Minister developed his proposals; the murmurs found echo among the Labour Party opposite, where peal followed peal of derisive laughter, until the Minister could scarcely make his voice heard above the hubbub.

It was not a defeat, it was a rout, and the word went round the House that the doom of the Government was sealed. The Irish members raised a pæan of exultation and, as the Minister's speech came to an abrupt termination, they leaped upon the seats and waved their handkerchiefs and were

only sorry that they had not shillelaghs with them in order to mark their joy by cracking a few crowns.

Coryton surveyed the scene with a vain attempt at calmness. His face lighted up with an intuition of coming triumph. He caught his wife's eye and smiled. Both felt that his hour had come.

"Shall you speak to-night, Mr. Coryton?" asked Lady Elizabeth Gargoyle carelessly, as he prepared to leave them.

"He is going down to save the Government," said Violet with a seriousness that made the others smile.

"You don't say so! Quite heroic," sneered Lady Giddy, who had never quite forgiven Coryton for getting married. "Almost another Quintus Curtius isn't he?"

Meanwhile it seemed as if the Independent Labour Party had only to advance and occupy the enemy's positions. Beer Hardup moved his instruction to the Committee in a short and vigorous

speech and, with an ambitious attempt at pathos, dwelt upon the hardship of compelling children to attend school all day and denying them beer and buns at eleven. He concluded by saying, amid ringing cheers from his colleagues, that their watchword was 'No surrender!' and their duty to make no compromise. The motion was seconded by Mr. Grit in the briefest possible terms, which, as Colonel Ballywalter whispered to Mr. Toadey-Snaile, was just as well, for the man spoke no intelligible language, not even his own.

By this time the rout seemed to have become general. The Ministerialists, sullen and dismayed, looked as if they would have liked to fling away their Orders of the Day, or whatever does duty, in a parliamentary battle, for chassepots, and take to flight at once. Sir Cincinnatus Spreadeagle stepped into the breach and was received with tumultuous cries of 'Divide!' not only from the opposition but, with even greater violence, from

the Tory Cave. His speech (already type-written and liberally distributed in the reporters' gallery, punctuated with 'Cheers') only served to make matters worse. He rallied the Tory cave on their lack of patriotism in a blundering sledge-hammer sort of way, which made them all the more restive and provoked several stage-whispers about the patriotism of alien adventurers. He attacked the Labour Party for the ill-turn they were doing to labour in depriving the children of the poor of their only chance of obtaining free breakfasts; and the Labour Party were only the more confirmed in their impatience with the Government.

He sat down amid derision, which was followed by a painful silence—a silence of indecision and a silence of triumphant expectation. Someone called out "Cameron," as a drowning man might call for a straw, but Lord Rupert only gnawed his moustache as if to say, "You must stew in your own juice. This pie is none of my making." A rumble of

'Divide! Divide!' swept along the Opposition benches, gathering volume as it went. Dr. Bob. Quid made a diversion by calling out "Order there among the rats!" because a Liberal Unionist member had sneezed. It was as complete a collapse as ever a Government had known.

The Speaker had half risen to put the question, after a last lingering look around the crowded House, to see if any other honourable member wished to catch his eye; the attendant inside the House, with a brass chain round his neck, like that of the winewaiter at a restaurant, had already poised himself to start and bustle the strangers out of their seats under the gallery; and the attendant outside, with a brass chain round his neck, like that of a city alderman, had already shaped his throat for the chaunt of 'Clear the lobby!'

Suddenly the spell was broken. A young man, whose features were not familiar to most of those present, had risen from the third bench below the

Ministerial gangway and was beginning to speak, as if it were the most simple and natural thing in the world.

It was a difficult moment to choose, for the House was in an excited, electric state, tossed about between derision and despair. Coryton, however, made the utmost of his advantages. He had not spoken more than two or three times in the House since his sensational election and those who had heard him, had been favourably impressed by his telling way of saying things and the opportuneness of their delivery. Moreover, those who had not heard him, cherished a certain curiosity about the personality of the young man who had relegated Mr. Loose-Fyshe to obscurity, and they where disposed to accord him a favourable hearing. His heart was beating very loud on what he felt was the great chance of his life, which, taken at the flood, *must* lead on to fortune. But to all outward appearance he was as calm and self-possessed as the oldest

of old parliamentary hands—calm and self-possessed and yet sufficiently modest and respectful in demeanour not to hurt the susceptibilities of the most jealous. His connection with Lord Southwark also stood him in good stead, for Lord Southwark was considered a coming man and known to have dabbled in labour questions, and a good deal of curiosity existed about that nobleman's view of the Government bill.

As Coryton proceeded, the good-natured interest, which had welcomed him, deepened into a breathless attention, such as is very rarely accorded by the House of Commons even to its most famous orators. Before he had finished, it seemed likely that the Government had been saved and it was certain that the young man's reputation had been called into being. He had begun by addressing himself to win over the Independent Labour Party. At the West Southwark election, he informed them, this very question had been prominently raised,

and he had been able to satisfy the desires of a body of men, who went even further in this question, than the honourable member for Houndsditch (Mr. Beer Hardup). He had promised them, on the authority of the Prime Minister, a bill this session, which would give children in Board schools not only free education, not only free breakfasts, not only beer and buns at eleven o'clock (Cheers from the Independent Labour Party), but also free dinners in the middle of the day (Renewed cheering). He now felt it his duty, in view of his election pledges and in view of the mandate of his constituents, to call upon the Government to redeem the Prime Minister's written promise, made to him last June. Let the portion of this bill dealing with the food question be struck out (Cheers from the Tory Cave) and another bill be introduced later on to confer upon the poor man's children the free meals, which the Prime Minister had promised them. (Cheers from the Independent

Labour Party.) After a few pointed generalities upon both the food and the education questions, which he skilfully introduced in order to give the Tory Cave and the Labour Party time to take in the full force of his proposals, he wound up with a brilliant peroration and sat down amid a tempestuous ovation, such as the House of Commons rarely accords.

The more his proposals had been rubbed in, the more they were liked on all hands. The Independent Labour Party saw a great triumph for itself and much glorification before its constituents and paymasters, in having extorted from the Government concessions even greater than those they had demanded. The Prime Minister's pledge was in black and white. It was public, formal, and, as far as they saw, could not now by any possible means be shirked. It was a triumph for their policy and it had the advantage of keeping in office a government infinitely more squeezable

than the Liberal party was ever likely to be. The Tory cave welcomed the emasculation of the objectionable clauses from the bill and felt confident it could procure the rejection of such a bill as Coryton had foreshadowed. The official Opposition also believed in the certainty of its rejection and, jumping to the conclusion that the fate of the Government would be bound up in it, rejoiced also. The Government itself was at first bewildered, as this was the first it had heard of the Prime Minister's pledge. Then gradually the conviction presented itself that this was the critical moment in their career and that, if they could weather it, their future was probably assured, while, if the worst came to the worst, delay would leave them to enjoy the sweets of office a little longer. Coryton had cut the Gordian knot and the tangle was unloosed.

Lord Rupert Cameron was the first to rise after the cheers at the end of Coryton's speech had at

length subsided. He was always the quickest to take in a situation and seize an advantage. He began by complimenting Coryton on 'his brilliant diplomacy, worthy of a Metternich or a Beaconsfield,' and still more on the masterly way in which he had expounded it. He dwelt upon the boldness of Coryton's action and hinted with much veiled sarcasm at the risks he had run of being disowned in case of failure. "But my honourable friend has not failed," he added amid universal applause, "and therefore he will not be disowned." He advised the Government, if for once they would take his advice, to adopt the course which his honourable friend had suggested. And he advised the leaders of the Independent Labour Party, who had always done justice to his (Lord Rupert's) sympathy with Labour Movement, to accept the Prime Minister's pledge, while yet it was on offer, and, in view of the generous concessions that had been made, to set up no obstacle to the separ-

ation of the two bills in the method suggested.

Mr. Grit followed, saying that he had great pleasure in accepting, both for himself and his colleagues, the terms offered by the Prime Minister, provided they were confirmed by the Minister in charge of the bill. This the Minister, who had meanwhile communicated with his chief, had no difficulty in doing and—despite a protest from Mr. Timothy Mealy that there was no occasion for eliminating the food clauses from the bill because the Government proposed to extend them,—the motion for adjournment was carried unanimously and next week the Free Education bill, lightened of its perplexing food clauses, was sent up to the House of Lords.

The Government was saved, and from that day forward its stability kept on increasing. So much so that, when the promised Food bill saw the light and was defeated on second reading by the connivance of the Government whips, the acuteness

of the question had passed away and the House only smiled at the impotent fury, with which the Independent Labour Party proclaimed itself to have been foiled.

The Government was saved and its saviour was the hero of the hour. The society papers were soon throwing out mysterious hints about the offer and rejection of an under-secretaryship and even about the prospects of Cabinet rank being immediately conferred. There was no truth in the rumours, of course, and they all might have been traced to one source, but they served their purpose none the less efficiently for that.

As good luck would have it, society was then on the look-out for a lion. There was no special African traveller in London with new yarns about 'the Anthropophagi and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders;' there was no Yankee circus-man with a picturesque hat and a certain knack of shooting straight at glass balls, acquired

by much practice at the heads of San Francisco bar-loafers; nor was there even an Oriental monarch, a revolutionary general, or a slack-baked poet, with whom long, curlless hair and unclean habits might pass for genius and plagiarized impertinences for natural wit.

So Walpole Coryton stepped by common consent into the vacant situation and seemed to bid fair, with his irresistible Vixie, to 'live happily ever afterward.' Everybody delighted to do them honour, from the Prime Minister, who had said, 'He will make a useful under-secretary,' down to Creeper Crawley and Toadey-Snaile, who abased themselves before them. All the saloons of Society vied for the honour of entertaining them and Majesty herself, deigning to share the public interest, sent a 'command' to dine and sleep at Windsor Castle. Everything and everybody smiled upon the happy pair and no one assuredly was better fitted than they to derive the fullest

enjoyment out of all that fortune had to offer.

"What have we done," Violet was never tired of asking herself and her husband, as she rejoiced again and again over the exeeding joy of living, "What have we done to deserve all this happiness?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SORROWS OF SANCTITY.

> The treasure that He lent us in life's garden.
> Falk, we shall find no answer then but this.
> Lord, we have lost it on our road to death.
>
> —IBSEN.

WHAT was happening to Gwendolen all this time? Had she found the upward path too steep, the narrow way too rough for her bleeding feet? Had she, like so many others in the first flush of enthusiasm, essayed a task which was too hard for her? Had she fainted, or turned aside by the way?

Not so. She was made of sterner stuff than

that. If her creed, if her conception of duty, was a narrow one, she had with it all the thoroughness born of that narrowness. She had mapped out for herself what she considered to be the right course and, having put her hand to the plough, she was not one lightly to turn back. Her aunt's shrill protests, the world's wondering sneers, Lord Baltinglass's anger (for when he found that she refused the ægis of his protection and the solace of his cheque book, his wrath knew no bounds), Miss Tyrconnel's tearful prayers—all left her absolutely untouched, nor swerved her one hair's-breadth from her purpose.

The only thing that could have moved her —a renewed appeal from her husband—remained unuttered. If, when she left him, he had followed her, sought her out, pleaded again for her pardon and her love, she might have forgiven him, might have thrown herself upon his breast and sobbed out all her sorrow there. The aura of his presence,

the glamour of his love, might have reasserted itself and conquered her. It might have done so —and it might not. Such possibilities must be banished to the limbo of 'might-have-beens', for she was never tested. In the first shock of her flight, Tyrconnel's wounded pride battled with his wounded love and kept him silent until it was too late. He was ill at first, as we know; then, when he had rallied enough to collect his scattered thoughts, when he sat down and poured out all his soul to her in a rush of penitence and weakness, the letter never reached her—she had left Cambridge for good. Her husband did not write again. This chilling silence was a thousand times worse than the most passionate rebuff. It stung his pride to the quick and made him more determined than ever to show that he could live without her, without them all, and that he could make his way in the world alone. Had he succeeded he would have written to her

again, but he failed. How could it be otherwise, when the ground around him was strewn with the bones of those who struggled before and had been vanquished in the unequal fight? His failure drove him back upon himself and made him think more hardly of his wife. He knew nothing of her father's sudden death nor of his ruin. When he thought of her, it was to picture her at Cambridge, the centre of a happy home—or perhaps with his father at Blarney, petted, pitied, caressed, taking a side against him, while he was struggling, outcast, alone. The thought made his heart hot with indignant pain.

In the meantime no one knew whither Gwendolen had gone, not Lord Baltinglass, nor Miss Tyrconnel, nor even Mrs. de Courcy Miles. When she quitted the home of her childhood one bleak February day, the home which was already under the auctioneer's hammer, Gwendolen resolutely turned her back on all the world. Henceforth she

would be dead to them, those false friends, those evils counsellors, who were trying to turn her from the path of right! A great longing came over her to be away from them all. After this turmoil and strife she wished to go aside into the wilderness and rest awhile. She chose the greatest wilderness of all—the wilderness of London. Here she took some little rooms in a dingy back street somewhere in Westbourne Grove, a street which was a sort of bastard off-shoot of that paradise of suburban shoppers, Westbourne Grove.

Gwendolen had been guided thither by the fact that an old servant of her mother's had married and settled years ago and let out 'apartments.' The woman was dead now, but her daughter carried on the anything but flourishing trade. So Gwendolen drifted there, but despite all her fortitude, all her stern sense of right, her heart sank within her as the cab rattled her up to the door of that dingy house in that dreary little street.

It was the first step on her pilgrimage of duty, or rather her sacrifice to a mistaken sense of duty—the first, but not the last for many a weary day.

In the long months which followed she suffered—ah! how she suffered!—as only these silent, still women can suffer and make no sign. The burden of the Great City's loneliness was upon her, a sense of desolation too great for words weighed her down. She did not indeed undergo that torture of vain questioning and doubt as to the right course, which a weaker nature—one less heavenly and more earthly—might have suffered, but ever and anon her heart would go out in spite of herself to her husband, and an aching yearning would come over her to see him again. But she stifled it down, this holy yearning—treated it as men and women of her type are wont to treat the promptings of nature—repressed it and thrust it aside as if the very thought were sin. But

stifle it down as she would, struggle as she would, the still small voice within her *would* make itself heard, the deep whisper beating ever in her heart—"*My husband!—My husband!—Wilfrid!—Wilfrid!*"

She little knew that on the other side of this great Babylon, the one her soul yearned for was fighting against all the hard circumstances of his life, battling against an insidious disease, toiling, struggling, in the vain endeavour to do something which should win back her duty and her love, which should make him 'more worthy' of her. She pictured her husband as still abroad, at Monte Carlo perhaps, or at Baden-Baden, Paris, Vienna, or some other wicked city. He loved such places better—far better—she tried to think, than he had ever loved her.

So these two wrong-headed young people went on their way alone, each sacrificing the heaven of happiness which lay within their reach—she to

her mistaken sense of duty—he to his wounded pride.

Meanwhile Gwendolen had to wonder how she was to live. Her father had died a ruined man. Everything he possessed had been seized upon by his creditors—and even those few things to which she might have laid a personal claim she did not demand. Her stern sense of conscientiousness made her yield up everything until the last debtor was satisfied. But she was not absolutely destitute. She had a little money in hand, very little—but then a woman is said to want so little—and a few trinkets, which could, if necessary, be converted into cash by a process of which she had hitherto been ignorant. Still, the fund she had in hand, though it would last for a time—for her wants were few and she seemed to take a pleasure in denying herself everything but the barest necessaries,—would not last for ever. To prevent its dwindling too rapidly, she must work. But how?

She had thought it so easy at first. She knew nothing of the terrible industrial struggle which presses even more heavily on women-workers than on men, which indeed in the low-skilled industries thrives on the very weakness of women. She had not recognized the fact that for women there is practically only one profession, and that an overcrowded one—to wit, matrimony. She knew nothing of these things. So she put her modest little advertisement in the *Guardian* and some other papers, to say that a lady wished to give lessons in music and painting and other arts. And then she waited. She might have been left waiting, for no answer came. At length she gave up advertising; it did no good and it only spent her money. It was as Mrs. de Courcy Miles had said, people didn't want governesses, especially governesses they knew nothing about, and Gwendolen was determined of all things to keep her past life a secret.

So she essayed fresh fields and pastures new and fell back upon her needle. She was clever at fancywork of all kinds, flower-painting on satin, crewels, Church-embroidery and so forth. All these things she had been accustomed to play at in the pretty-pretty way, which ladies call 'work.'

She took some specimens of her needlework to the great Emporium hard by, and endeavoured to find employment. The result was not encouraging. They had no work to give, but the Manager, a kind-hearted man, touched by the look of patient sorrow on the girl's sweet face, told her of a shop in Bond Street which dealt largely in lamp-shades—marvels of silk and lace—photograph-frames, hand-screens, and like trifles. Here Gwendolen was more successful. They could give her much work at an inverse ratio of pay. But it was work she could do at home, and, small though the price of her labour was, she was thankful to get it. It helped to eke out her scanty fund, and

it gave her something to occupy her thoughts.

She needed it. She worked feverishly, incessantly, trying through prayer and much sewing to still that deep whisper, ever beating in her heart, to blot out that image which strive as she might would rise unbidden before her eyes. By day she was fairly successful, but by night—ah! who can keep guard over the truant visions of the night? Sometimes in her dreams her love would live once more—her husband would come to her again, his voice whisper in her ear, his warm kisses press themselves upon her lips, his curly head pillow itself upon her bosom—and then she would wake with a start to find it was but a dream. A device of the Evil One, she deemed it, instead of the voice of Nature struggling against the unnatural restraints she had imposed, and true to her stern creed, she would arise and kneel down shivering in the cheerless room—praying that she might have grace to fight against temptation, trying to

comfort herself with the promise which comforted of old the doubting Peter,

'*Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My name's sake shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*'

But Gwendolen was not Peter, she was only a loving woman; and, though she murmured in the fervency of her prayer, "Thy strength shall be sufficient for me"—yet in her heart she knew that it was not sufficient. How could it be? She was but flesh and blood after all. She yearned after the visible, not the invisible, the tangible, not the intangible, the real, not the unreal. Yet still she would kneel there fighting with herself, while the hours wore themselves on through the night, until the first grey gleam of dawn lit up the sordid room. There was something sublime in this abandonment of self. It was the same spirit which animated the Virgin Martyrs of the

Early Church and made them yield their slender bodies to the rack and to the flames.

But the Virgin Martyrs probably found happiness—the happiness which the Moslem feels when he rushes to meet his death upon the bayonets of the infidel—and Gwendolen did not. It is all very well to say that to do right is the only happiness. Gwendolen was doing right, or what she firmly believed to be right, which is the same thing, since right is a relative term all the world over. Yet she was not happy. The awful sense of loneliness entered like iron into her soul.

So dragged the months along. March passed by, April and Easter came. The trees in the parks put on their summer vesture of green and the butterflies of fashion came out with the sunshine. The Season waxed and waned. In July Gwendolen read by chance of Coryton's election in the papers. Do what she would, she could not altogether keep down the feeling of bitterness, which rose in her

breast when she read it. This man—her husband's false friend, as she now knew him to be, the man who had ruined her father and brought her to the verge of penury,—was flourishing like the Green Bay Tree. Like the Psalmist of old, she found this thing too hard for her until she went into the Sanctuary of her Faith. That brought peace and refreshment into her soul for a time, but only for a time.

About this time Gwendolen became very ill. The mental worry, the inferior food, the close air all told upon her health. For a time she gave way utterly, broken down both in body and mind. All through the days which followed, scorching August days when the Park was a desert and the streets dusty and glaring, she lay in her room listless, dispirited, drooping like a faded flower, praying for death. So she remained all through the autumn which followed, until the November fogs came and stern necessity made her arise

from her couch and take up her work again. Poverty is a hard task master, it takes no account of wrecked lives nor broken hearts; and so Gwendolen found it. Christmas passed, the New Year dawned, but it brought no promise of joy or hope to Gwendolen Tyrconnel. The anniversary of her wedding-day came and went. She spent it with prayer and bitter tears.

One evening in late February she started forth to take her work back to the shop from which she was employed. It was the very evening—so mysterious are the workings of destiny, or so odd are the freaks of chance—the very evening that Coryton was making his brilliant hit in the House of Commons. Gwendolen had been working incessantly all day to get her task finished in time. Her limbs felt stiff and cramped, her head ached, her eyes were dizzy, she had not given herself time for food—but she had done her work, and now she must take it back. It was not often she went

out after dusk, but she had no one to send, and the Bond-Street establishment closed at seven o'clock. She must get it there before closing time at all hazards.

The darkness of the cold damp day had closed in. The lamps were looming large through the gloom as Gwendolen walked along the muddy pavements, drawing her waterproof more tightly around her as she went. She felt weak and tired; she had not gone far before she felt she could walk no longer, so in the Bayswater Road she hailed a passing 'bus. It was an extravagance, (every penny spent was an extravagance to Gwendolen now,) but it was one she could not help. At the top of Bond Street she alighted and the 'bus went on its way down Oxford Street and Holborn.

The shop for which she was bound was situated in Old Bond Street, hard by the Burlington Arcade. There is not in all London a prettier sight than

Bond Street just the hour after dusk, when the shops are lighted before closing for the day. The Art Galleries, the jewellers, the modistes, the flower shops, all reveal their treasures in the glow of the lamp-light, and the narrow thoroughfare brings either side well within the range of vision. But Gwendolen hurried along, her thick veil down, her parcel under her arm, looking neither to the right nor to the left. She never came to this neighbourhood without a sense of fear lest some chance meeting might reveal her to those whom she of all things wished to avoid, and when possible, she sent a messenger. But to-night it had not been possible.

About half way down the street a man lounged out of a cigar shop. A stout man with big fishy eyes and a Jewish cast of countenance, over-dressed after the manner of his type, with a loud necktie, louder gloves, a blue overcoat, and a button-hole of blue carnations—evidently one of

those low brutes who prowl around, seeking whom they may devour. As Gwendolen passed he accosted her. A woman, alone and unprotected, was fine game to him. A cold terror struck her heart. All the months she had been in London this was the first time that anyone had dared to molest her thus; she gave him a withering glance and hurried on. Nothing daunted, he stalked after his prey, following her, quickening his pace to accord with hers, every now and then making some remark whose inanity scarcely veiled the covert insult. How dared he?—How dared he? The sense of her unprotected condition had never been brought home so vividly to Gwendolen before. Oh! if her husband were only here. She hailed the shop for which she was bound as a haven of refuge.

She was kept there waiting some time, for those who come to sell are treated very differently to those who come to buy,—but at last she disposed

of her parcel and received the reward of her labour—a few shillings.

When she came out, to her dismay she found her persecutor still waiting. In her anxiety to avoid him she turned into the Burlington Arcade. In her innocence she did not know—how was she to know?—the reputation this region has won for itself when the lamps are lit—or that the smartly dressed fair who flaunt up and down beneath the covered dome can hardly be said, like Cæsar's wife, to be above suspicion. The man evidently took the bend her steps had turned as a tacit encouragement, for he followed her and accosted her again, this time in unmistakable terms. She gave him one look of horror and indignation, and then sped as fast as her feet would take her out of the Arcade. As she was rushing across Burlington Gardens (just where the road turns into Bond Street) a smart little brougham dashed along at full speed. In her blind terror Gwendolen ran

right under the horse's nose. There was a warning shout from a policeman, and a scream from some woman standing by; the coachman tried to pull up, but it was too late. Before he could do so or Gwendolen could swerve aside, the shaft had struck her on the shoulder and she fell senseless to the ground.

In a moment confusion reigned supreme, the crowd closed around and the carriage came to a standstill. The brougham window was let down with a rush, and a little figure with golden hair—a vision of satin and sables—sprang out and elbowed her way through the crowd to where the senseless woman lay. A policeman was before her and lifted the drooping head, waving back those who huddled around. The lady of the sables and the satin gave one glance towards the senseless form, the white beautiful face, the shabby black dress. Then she shrieked in shrill amazement,

"Goodness gracious! If it isn't Mrs. Tyrconnel!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOOD OF ST. JOHN.

Extremes in everything is a characteristic
of woman.

—De Goncourt.

When Gwendolen recovered consciousness, it was to find herself lying on a downy bed, lapped in an all-pervading sense of warmth and drowsiness. She looked about her in a semi-bewildered way. It was a pretty room, prettily furnished. The bed hangings were of rose pink, edged with lace; the toilet-ware and window curtains were of the same delicate hue, which tinted also the woodwork of the furniture. A night-light was dimly burning,

and a fire of red coals glowed in the grate. It was a picture of warmth and comfort. By the side of the fire was drawn up a large arm-chair and a table with a medicine bottle and glass upon it, also a servant's cap. But whoever had occupied the chair, it was tenantless for the nonce, and Gwendolen was alone.

At first she thought she must be dreaming. How came she here in this luxurious nest, so different from her sordid little room in Bayswater? Where was she? What did it all mean? She raised herself on one elbow, and again her eyes wandered round the room, taking in each item in mute amaze. Suddenly they lighted on her mud-stained waterproof, which was thrown carelessly across a chair ...... Ah! she remembered ..... that dreadful man .... the rush across the street ..... the blow on her shoulder. It still ached with pain ..... the fall.

But how came she here?

A sudden terror struck her, banishing all her

drowsiness in an instant. She remembered the evil look in the man's eyes. Had she been seized, kidnapped, carried off, while still unconscious, to some den of vice? Innocent, guileless though she was, Gwendolen had vague ideas about vice,—indefinite notions gleaned from chance paragraphs in the newspapers—veiled hints of wickedness too great for words.

Fearfully she gazed around in the flickering light, her heart seemed almost to stop its beating. What she expected to see, she knew not, nor did she know that those who are most vicious make the least parade of their vice. Anyway, her scrutiny was reassuring to her; there was nothing to suggest evil here. A few chaste water-colours in Oxford frames adorned the walls, over the fire-place there was a picture of a distinctly religious type; the chintz-covered furniture looked innocent enough to have graced the 'spare bed-room' of a respectable family.

Still the terror was upon her. She got up and began hurriedly to huddle on her dress. Her head was dizzy, her knees so weak that she could scarcely stand, the pain in her shoulder made her slow of movement. But she managed to dress somehow, fear lent her strength.

With uncertain, feeble steps, guiding herself by the furniture, as invalids are wont to do, she tottered to the door, and opening it noiselessly, peered out.

Gaslights were flaring on the stairs and in the narrow hall beneath. The clock on the landing pointed to half-past one. Gwendolen gasped. She must have been here nearly seven hours. She crept cautiously down the stairs. As she did so, the sound of boisterous merriment burst upon her ears. It issued from the half-open door of a room on the ground floor. Gwendolen shuddered and drew back. To her distorted sense, it sounded like the unholy mirth of a Pandemonium. Oh! to

what terrible place had she come? How should she escape from it? Beyond that room lay the hall-door, and the safety of the outer air. She must reach it at all hazards. She had gathered up her strength for a sudden rush, when upon her ears there fell the sound of her own name.

"I'd just been round to Schwabe's to try on a frock..... You might have knocked me down with a feather," cried a high-pitched, staccato voice, "I never was so taken aback in all my life..... When I caught sight of her face, I'm blessed if 'twasn't Mrs. Wilfrid Tyrconnel."

Gwendolen paused in amazement. Where had she heard that voice before?—Ah! she remembered, she was not likely to forget, for with it was associated the bitterest hour of her life. And yet—could it be?

Urged by an irresistible impulse, she moved towards the half-opened door. At first, she could see nothing. It was a long double room, with heavy

curtains of blue plush dividing it mid-way. These curtains were drawn now and the back part of the room, which Gwendolen entered with noiseless step, lay in darkness, save that a glimmer of light made its way through where the curtains met. It was the smallest opening, but through it Gwendolen was able to see without being seen.

A sight met her eyes which was new to her, but which crystallized at once all her vague notions of an evil life. And yet on the surface there was nothing so very evil about this particular gathering. It was only the burlesque actress, Miss de Vere, *née* Popkins, entertaining Miss Gussie Gutter of music-hall fame, Miss Pussie Prancewell, and a few friends of the other sex to supper after the play. True, the guests were expressing themselves in that free and easy fashion current in Bohemia; and, if noise were a criterion, they seemed to be enjoying themselves, though very likely they were not, for Bohemia is often at the bottom as dull

and flat as average Exeter Hall respectability. But Gwendolen judged from appearances.

It was a little, gaudily-furnished room, crammed with furniture, *poufs*, cushions, and photographs, a room full of discords of colour and glare of gilding. The air was thick with tobacco smoke and heavy with scent. On a round table pushed away now against the wall, were the remains of a substantial supper—oysters and Chablis, lobsters and champagne, devilled bones and brandies and sodas,—plenty of variety and plenty of everything. The light from the red lamp-shades threw a meretricious glow over the group gathered around the fire. Sally was there, the centre of the group, lying back in a low chair heaped around with downy cushions—but not Sally as Gwendolen had seen her last—as she had pictured her ever since, a poor little Marguerite in a shabby black frock—but Sally radiant with rouge and pearl powder, with diamonds—real or sham—gleaming on her

white bosom and in the golden mist of her fluffy hair—Sally in shimmer of satin and lace—Sally a very Circe incarnate, with a cigarette stuck between her lips and a big tumbler of something by her side, her roguish little face lit up as she held forth for the benefit of the others around her. And those others! Miss Gussie Gutter in a flaunting garb of red and yellow, with her hands clasped behind her head, sitting on the arm of a chair, and that hereditary legislator, Lord Welcher, reclining on the bear-skin rug at her feet,—Miss Prancewell also *en grande tenue* on a sofa and, by her side—what did he here?—that eminent legislator and Exeter Hall luminary, Mr. Toadey-Snaile, M.P. There was yet one more—his back was towards her, but Gwendolen had no difficulty in recognizing the thick-set bull neck and stubbly black hair of Lord Pimlico. With difficulty she suppressed a scream. To what terrible place had she been brought? The trail of the serpent seemed

over all; yet she could not fly; terror and amazement kept her rooted to the spot. She put her hand to her heart, and gasped for breath. Meanwhile the high-pitched voice went on:

"So I told the bobby that she was a friend of mine. What are you grinning at, Pim? What else could I say? And he lifted her into the brougham and off we were like a shot out of that horrid crowd which was enough to suffocate anybody. The doctor says the fall's nothing. She fainted more from fright than anything else, and when she showed signs of coming to and was light-headed, he gave her something to make her doze off again. She'll be as right as a trivet in the morning."

"You don't mean to say she's here now?" cried Mr. Toadey-Snaile in astonishment and alarm.

"You don't think I should turn her out in the streets, do you?" retorted Sally indignantly. "I am not quite such a brute as that, and she was good

to me once on a time . . . . . Yes, she's upstairs in bed,—at least I s'pose so; I haven't seen her since I came back, but Jane's looking after her—if the lazy hussy hasn't gone to sleep, that is."

"Miss de Vere turned good Samaritan!" snig-gered Toadey-Snaile. "How touching!"

"Better than a Pharisee, any day," rejoined Sally tartly. Her sentiment evoked a sturdy "hear, hear," from the fair Gussie.

Lord Welcher gave a tipsy snort. He had been half asleep during this colloquy.

"Don't you think we'd better be toddlin', Gussie?" he queried drowsily.

"Dry up," retorted that damsel, giving him a tap on the head with her satin slipper. "Go on, Sally, don't take any notice of him. What are you going to do with her, when she comes to?"

"I'm blessed if I know!" said Sally with a puzzled air. "It's a rum go altogether. Whatever could make the likes of her be running about the

Burlington at that time of night, and all alone too? And the doctor says he doesn't think she has had half enough to eat—and she'd got a pair of boots on that I wouldn't touch with the tongs, —all down at heel, and an old frock—well, it's almost as bad as what I used to wear when I was in a garret, starving on a bloater and four and sixpence a week, before——"

"You knew me," interrupted Pimlico. He was always inclined to be spiteful in his cups.

"Oh, long before that," rejoined Miss Popkins coolly, "though you don't part with any more than you can help—I know that."

Whereat there was a general laugh. Even Lord Welcher joined in under his bibulous breath.

"I'm sure I can't make it out," resumed Sally reflectively—"pass the cigarettes will you, Toadey, if you don't mean to keep them all to yourself. What beats me is how she got like this—a real swell too! What can her husband be thinking

about? But there, I always said he wasn't fit to black her boots."

"Her husband!" echoed Pimlico. "He's on his last legs too, I hear. Poor Pigeon! Don't you know they had an awful row at Cannes about something or other, and she went off and left him then and there. You ought to know all about it, Sally——"

Sally winced, and turned almost pale beneath her rouge.

"You don't mean to say," she exclaimed in unfeigned astonishment, "that she ran away from him because of *that!*"

"I do mean to say it," repeated Pimlico doggedly, "and what's more, when he got back to England, old Baltinglass turned him out of doors without a sou in his pocket. I believe he took to quill-drivin' or somethin', but somebody told me the other day he was dead."

He took another swig at his whiskey and soda.

"No, he isn't," chimed in Pussie Prancewell, speaking now for the first time, "but he's precious near it, I can tell you. You remember Olive Jennings of the Gaiety chorus, don't you, Sally? She has been terribly down on her luck lately. I went to see her the other day, in Duchess Street, Soho. That is where she is living now, and bless me, who should have a room of the top floor but Tyrconnel? I met him accidentally on the stairs, as I was going up one day. I should never have known him, he looked out at elbows, half starved, and scarcely able to drag himself along, but something in his face struck me, and I asked Olive who it was. She said she believed his name was Tyrconnel, and he was dying of gallopin' consumption—Gracious Goodness! —What*ever's* that!!"

There was a low moan—a sudden cry—the next moment the blue velvet curtains were rent asunder, and a pale agonized woman tottered

forward, and almost fell at the speaker's feet.

"Dying—you say—dying? Wilfrid—my husband, dying,—and I never knew it! Oh! where is he?—where is he?—take me to him——"

Banquo's ghost at the banquet—the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast could not have brought greater confusion than this sudden apparition—sudden as it was unexpected—wrought on this select assembly. The men sprang to their feet—all except Lord Welcher, who still sat on the hearthrug blinking his little red eyes in tipsy wonder. Sally gave a screech, Gussie Gutter, as she afterwards phrased it, felt 'all of the creeps'—Miss Prancewell, to whom this appeal was addressed, stared as though she were confronted with a spectre.

"Where is he? Oh, take me to him," wailed Gwendolen again, wringing her hands—oblivious of everything save her husband's dire need. The wifely instinct was aroused in her at last. She

pictured him starving, dying, helpless, deserted. A great rush of pity and love swept over her, breaking all barriers down.

"Sixty-four, Duchess Street, Soho," gasped out Miss Prancewell, too astonished to equivocate, "There don't take on so—don't," she added, touched in spite of herself, at the look of unspeakable sorrow on the pale face.

But her words fell on deaf ears. Worn-out by conflicting emotions, weak from long fasting and overwork, exhausted by all she had gone through,—even as she spoke Gwendolen reeled and fell. For the second time, she fainted....

"I think we'd better be toddlin', Gussie," the noble peer said again when the confusion had somewhat subsided. He had remained in a semi-torpid condition throughout.

Miss Gutter promptly took the hint and, tucking his arm through her own, marched his uncertain steps to the door. Pussie Prancewell followed

suit. Toadey-Snaile had long since disappeared, skulking off at the first alarm. A wholesome dread of the wife of his bosom and a terror of being arraigned before his constituents by a reptile press, if this escapade should leak out, lent wings to his flight. Sally was kneeling by the side of the insensible girl, chafing the cold hands. Pimlico hovered around, uncertain whether to go or to stay.

"Here's a silly go," he exclaimed presently, addressing Sally's back. "What are you going to do with her, I should like to know?"

"You'd better let her people know," said Sally without looking up. "Lord Baltinglass ought to be told where she is—and then he can come and fetch her away."

"Oh, that be hanged," cried Pimlico. He was in a very bad temper at this premature breaking-up of the party, just when he had settled down to make a night of it too. "You don't catch me

mixing myself up with it. Why, he or the Guv'nor 'd be wanting to know how I came here, and then what should I say?"

Sally shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"Tell a lie," she said. "'Twouldn't be the first you have told by a good many."

Pimlico glowered, but did not venture the retort which rose to his lips. Sally in her 'tantrums' was a difficult person to deal with.

"Better have her put to bed—and we'll talk it over," he hazarded presently.

"I am not going to leave her any more to-night," said Sally. And she meant it.

"Well, in that case," he said sulkily, "I'd better make tracks, I suppose."

To this Sally deigned no response. But when he had put on his hat and coat and came to claim a caress, she pushed him roughly from her with a sudden spasm of shame.

"Oh! go away, do," she cried. "Can't you

see how I feel just now? I might have been almost a good woman, if it hadn't been for you."

Pimlico made no further remonstrance. He was too much astonished at this new phase of feeling. He banged out of the door in a huff, and hailing a hansom—there were always hansoms hanging round Alpha Cottage in the small hours of the morning—jumped in, and drove off westward.

* * * * * * * *

"God may forgive you, I never can."

The words sounded stern and hard, but they were not sterner nor harder than Gwendolen's heart. She stood there in the cold grey light of the early morning, buttoning her cloak with trembling hands. Every nerve quivered with repulsion as she looked at the woman before her. For Sally, moved by a strange, unaccountable impulse peculiar to excitable souls, smitten by

compunction at the sight of the anguish, which she had wrought, maudlin too, perchance, from the frequent nips of Cognac which she had taken to sustain her through the trying night, had told her all. All the story of that plot at Cottenham, of the net spread before the bird, of the one fall and subsequent recoil, of Coryton's suggestions at Les Douleurs and Monte Carlo;—of everything in fact, exonerating Tyrconnel and shelving all the blame, or as much of it as she could, upon Coryton's shoulders. Still, palliate it as she would, she was a consenting party, privy to the plot, the willing tool whereby it was carried out. The damning fact remained.

"I'm sure I never thought you'd take it like you did," snivelled Sally, moved to tears at this stern rejection of her prayer for pardon, "I thought you'd give him a wiggin' of course, and then kiss and make friends again,—like—like anybody else. Why even if all I had told you was true

—and it wasn't—it was no more than plenty of other men have done—and are doing every day. Oh! I could tell you some pretty tales about people you little think it of—and of old men too. Old men," she wound up viciously, "are the worst of the lot."

Gwendolen put up her hand with a stern gesture of silence. But the torrent of Sally's exculpatory drivel was not to be stemmed thus; it simply swerved in other directions.

"And I was hard up too," she continued,—"very hard up, I was. I didn't know where to turn for a penny or I never should have done it—never. I lost everything on the tables, and he only gave me a tenner—at least that was all that thief of a Coryton gave me from him, though I'm quite sure now that he bagged the rest himself. Oh, it's bad to be poor,—that it is."

She began to whimper again like a beaten puppy.

Gwendolen's eyes travelled slowly round the room—the rose-hued hangings, the lace-fringed curtains, the pretty furniture—all seemed to her part of the price of sin. Lastly her eyes came back to Sally herself—a poor dishevelled Sally in this morning light. Her eyes were red as a ferret's,—tears had mingled with the rouge and powder on her face, producing an effect akin to that of a washed-out doll. Last evening's dissipation followed by a sleepless night had told on her. She looked the wreck of her painted beauty. And yet—Gwendolen felt no pity. She had been fooled, tricked, lied to, she had been betrayed, she had blighted two lives, by her incapacity to take a wide view of life. And this woman, who had lured her husband into sin and who had lied to her, was now suing her pardon. Faugh! It was only one more piece of dissimulation. Just now she was a poor bedraggled Magdalen, indeed. By and by she would be smiling again, in silks

and velvets and diamonds. A wave of repulsion swept over her!

"This is not poverty," she said, sweeping her hand around, "Shame on you—shame!"

"No, it isn't," said Sally, becoming in a moment less lachrymose and more defiant. The utter scorn of Gwendolen's words penetrated even her thick skin. A worm will turn at last. "This is the gilding of the pill," she went on bitterly, "this is what makes ,sin,' as you call it—so attractive. Four and sixpence a week, a garret and a herrin', working from dawn to night,—that was what virtue had to offer me, so I could stand it no longer: I chose vice. And,"—looking around,—"can you wonder?"

Gwendolen shuddered,—shuddered at the gulf of degradation which seemed to yawn at her very feet. Sally misinterpreted the gesture and applied it as personal to herself.

"Yes," she cried with a bitter resentful laugh. "I'm what I am, and I am not ashamed to own

it. But bad as I am, I don't know that I'd change places with you. You seem precious sure of being in the right. Well, you may be. I only know this: If a man loved me—worse luck, no one ever has—or if I loved a man, husband or no husband, I'd stick to him through thick and thin, right or wrong, good or bad, rich or poor, it'd make no difference to me. If he was bad as the Devil, I'd stick to him just the same. But you, with your cantin' and psalm-singin', just because of one little slip, you go and chuck your husband over like an old shoe—and leave him to die or go to the Devil for all you care. If that's being good, let me be bad, I say!"

"Oh, spare me, spare me," pleaded Gwendolen piteously, looking around to seek some means of escape. Everyone of these reproaches, coarsely put though they were, sped home. "I'm going to him—going at once—only spare me."

The look of anger died out of Sally's face in

an instant. She felt herself in the presence of some great grief, some conflict of the soul she could not fathom.

"There, there," she said soothingly, "don't mind what I say. You shouldn't have provoked me. I only want to make up for what I've done. No doubt you thought you were doing right—though how you could think so, beats me into a cocked hat. But then I am not a religious woman," she added without any conscious irony ..... "What are you looking about for? You needn't be in such a hurry to get away. I'm not plague-stricken."

"I must go to him," cried Gwendolen, hardly hearing what the other was saying. "Oh! God help me out of this wicked house! I cannot breathe, cannot think here."

"But you can't go like this," remonstrated Sally—"here's your umbrella, if that's what you are looking for. It's not seven o'clock—the servants aren't up yet. If you'll wait a little time, and

have some breakfast, I'll send you in my carriage. You'll never find your way there like that."

"I cannot wait, I cannot wait," reiterated Gwendolen looking wildly aroundher. "Sixty-four, Duchess Street, Soho. Did you hear what that woman said? He may be dying now—even now—and no one beside him. Oh! Wilfrid, why have I kept away from you so long? Oh! God forgive me!"

"You won't forgive me," said Sally meaningly.

Gwendolen turned towards her, the light of a great renunciation dawning over her face.

"I do forgive you," she said solemnly, "I was wrong. What am I?—I, who never knew your hard life, nor your temptations, that I should judge you? I need forgiveness more than you. I see it all now —now—that it is too late."

She moved towards the door.

"Let me come with you if you must go," pleaded Sally brokenly, gulping down her tears. "Let me

come with you—you aren't fit to go by yourself, really you aren't."

But Gwendolen moved her gently aside.

"I must go alone," she said, "alone."

Thus she left her.

And yet—let the cynic sneer an he will—a few minutes after she had gone out in the grey dullness of the cheerless dawn the front door opened again to let out a little figure cloaked and veiled, who followed her—followed her all the way—afar off.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST STAGE.

'Out—out, brief candle.'

—MACBETH.

THE fog-demon brooded over everything and seemed to stifle the morning with its vampire wings. It penetrated everywhere, creeping with stealthy, resistless step alike into West End mansions and East End hovels. Among other places it crept up the evil-smelling stairs of Number Sixty-four, Duchess Street, Soho, and penetrated into a sordid attic on the topmost floor.

On a narrow bed in one corner of the room

lay the wreck of what was once Wilfrid Tyrconnel, fighting his last fight with the fell disease which had long since marked him for its own. The grey mist, which straggled in through the dirty yellow blind, was too thick to admit of his face being clearly seen, but his laboured breathing could be heard smiting the silence, broken at intervals by a terrible, racking cough. Every now and then he would turn in the bed and draw the scanty covering higher around him, not that he was cold—how could he be with that dry fever running hot in his veins?—but in very restlessness, the restlessness born of a sleepless night. By and by, his hand groped on the floor beside the bed for the cup of cold water which he hoped was there to slake his thirst. He lifted it,—it was empty! There was plenty more water in the chipped jug which stood on yonder box—an improvised washstand. But he had not the energy to get out of bed to go across to it. He gave a

little weary sigh—even that effort brought on his cough. Would the morning never come? It had come already, but he knew it not, the dull greyness seemed as night to him, He had no means of telling the time. His watch? That had gone long ago.

At last a heavy step was heard ascending the creaking stairs. The door opened in response to a shove from without and a stout, red-faced woman elbowed her way in, a woman in a greasy cotton frock and sleeves rolled up her chapped and brawny arms. She was another specimen of that horrible genus, the cheap lodging-house shark, a shade lower than Tyrconnel's hostess at Bloomsbury because a shade less prosperous.

" 'Ere's yer brekfus'," she panted, in a coarse, fat voice, somewhat wheezy from the long ascent; and she banged down upon the bed a battered tray on which reposed a metal tea-pot, a cup, and a hunch or two of thick bread and butter. " And

'ere", plunging her hand into a capacious pocket, "'ere's yer letters. P'raps I'd better light the candle, the fog's that thick ye can hardly see yer 'and afore yer face, and then ye can read wot's in 'em,—somethin' good, I 'opes, this time."

She proceeded to light a tallow dip with a brimstone match. The match sent forth an evil smell; the candle spluttered and flared in the murky gloom, throwing weird, misshapen shadows upon the wall. It was like a glimpse of Tophet, or one of William Blake's studies of Hell.

Tyrconnel dragged himself up in the bed and, seizing the letters, eagerly began to break the seals. The woman crossed her brawny arms and leaned back against the wall, watching him the while with a sort of contemptuous pity in which a gleam of avarice was mingled.

He took the packets in his trembling hands. The first two he knew alas! too well,—rejected MSS. They had been backwards and forwards

many a weary time. They came back again to him now, one with a printed form of conventional regret, the other with contemptuous silence. The third was a bill marked 'account rendered,' with an intimation that legal proceedings would be taken. They must hurry, he thought grimly; he would be out of the reach of legal proceedings before long. The last was from the editor of a leading monthly Review on whom he had staked all his hopes. His paper had been accepted, it would contain the cheque. Alas! no—'pressure upon our space compels us to hold the article over until our next issue.' Oh! this was cruel! . . . . The letter fell from his nerveless hands, all the light died out of his face.

"Well?" said the woman interrogatively. Then seeing that no answer came, she went on in a shriller key—"'Ev yer got anythink for me, or 'ev yer not? That's wot I want to know. Come—hout with it."

"I—I—" faltered Tyrconnel, then his eyes fell upon another letter lying on the blanket, one he had overlooked in his haste. He seized it as a starving dog seizes a bone. He knew the handwriting, it was that of a friend, a dear friend in the old days, to whom, knowing that his paper was accepted, he had written in his dire need and after a fierce struggle with his pride, asking for a trifling loan of £10 until the editor should send him a cheque. It was such a small favour—and such a dear friend! Of course it was granted..... but..... what was this?..... A platitude as to 'regret'..... a lie about 'so many claims'..... a false hope that 'things may soon be brighter'..... that was all. He fell back with a groan.

"Come, hout with it," repeated the woman again, more insolently this time, for she noted how the blank greyness had crept over his face.

"I—I—am very sorry," he faltered, "more sorry than I can say." They promised, you know,

to put my article in, and I had hoped they would have sent me a cheque, but it has been held over until next month—and——"

"'Eld over till next month!" screeched the landlady in her coarse, strident voice—"and so I'm to be 'eld over till next month too, I s'pose? Not if I knows it. That's a tale I've 'eard once too often,—I can tell yer."

"But—but, you see what they say," gasped Tyrconnel, holding out the letter. "They will put it in next month—really they will, and then I shall be able to pay you."

"I don't care when they put it in," she said, flicking the letter contemptuously aside. "Wot I wants to know is when I'm goin' to put some o' your tin into my pocket. 'Ere's three an' a narf weeks owin' for rent, let alone yer keep, an' all sorts o' hextras which I've got yer, too. I won't go on no longer. If I don't 'ave somethink on account by to-night—out yer goes, so there!"

She stuck her arms akimbo and faced him with angry eyes.

She was not a bad-hearted woman—at least not worse than her kind, only the struggle for existence was pretty hard on her too. Years of keeping a cheap lodging-house and of haggling with prostitutes and penniless clerks had blunted her finer feelings—such as they had been.

"I—I—" panted Tyrconnel, looking round like a rat caught in a trap—"I will go out and see what I can . . . . ." Here the cough came and choked his utterance. He lay gasping, panting for breath, clutching the air with his wasted hands.

The woman eyed him with stony indifference; his sufferings only seemed to add to her exasperation.

"Go hout!" she echoed, with a brutal laugh. "Yes, yer'll go hout sure enough, I'll see to that—go to the 'orsepital if they'll 'ave yer, or into the work'us, where yer ought to 'ave gone long 'afore. You ain't fit for nothin' else. I ain't agoin'

to 'ave no corpses knockin' about 'ere and so I tells yer. I've 'ad enough trouble with yer already..... Well, I'll leave yer to think it over. I can't waste the morning talkin' to the likes o' you. When I comes back, hout yer go."

So saying, she snatched up the untasted breakfast and bounced out of the room.

Left to himself, Tyrconnel buried his face in the dirty pillow, trying to shut out light, sound, everything. There comes a point past suffering, a dead apathy beyond the power of words to phrase. He had reached it now. All through the weary months which had passed since we saw him last, he had been fighting his hand-to-hand fight with adversity and disease, but the struggle was too hard. He had been beaten at last, not in the spirit but in the body. It was this physical weakness which had dragged him down. In spirit, Tyrconnel would struggle on to the last, but the body had refused to do its bidding.

With that obstinacy, which,—paradoxical though it may seem,—one finds sometimes in the most emotional natures, he resisted still. Perhaps his pride helped him too, a pride inherited from his mother. And yet,—the thought struck him once more,—he had only to make a sign, to own his failure, to make known his need to Lord Baltinglass, and this sordid garret, this brutal landlady, these hideous surroundings would vanish like magic, and he would find himself surrounded by everything that wealth, and luxury, and medical skill could give. But he thrust the thought from him with passionate scorn. He had suffered so much,—could he not suffer a little more? A few days, maybe a few hours—and then nothing this earth could give, nothing this cruel world could do, would matter to him any more. Earthly prosperity seems so small a thing in the presence of the King of Terrors. No, all things might fail him, but he would at least keep his selfrespect. He would die

without making one sign more to the relatives who had spurned him, the wife who had abandoned him. Better torture, better hunger, better death—better anything than that, to crawl back as a suppliant with that most pitiful word 'failure' branded on his brow.

Brave thoughts indeed! Then there rose up to mock them the vision of that coarsed-voiced woman worrying for her rent, clamouring like Shylock for her pound of flesh. Unless he could find something to stop her voracious maw, the vulture would not even let him die in peace. But how? The thought struck him like an inspiration. If he went to the editor of the Review which had accepted his paper and told him his need, surely he would give him a cheque. Editors were but human after all, and then—it would not be begging, the work was done and approved, the payment was due. Full of this new idea he threw off the blanket, and got out of bed. Alas! he

had reckoned without that laggard body. A few steps convinced him of the futility, the impossibility of the task. His feet tottered, his knees gave way . . . . that awful cough seized him again, shaking his very frame. He tried to stand up against it; he fell back exhausted on the bed.

It was true then—what this women had said—he must die, die in a hospital or a workhouse—die with the task he had set himself to do unfinished, with his life-work just begun. Sheridan had died thus in poverty, with the bailiffs tugging at his sheets, but then Sheridan had done his work, had accomplished something, which would last through all time, handing his name down to posterity an imperishable monument among men. But he, he had done nothing—his name, as poor Keats had said in his unprophetic soul—his name was 'writ in water.' If the remnant of life were so hard, wherefore should he live it? His eyes travelled around the room, but there was nothing—nothing

whereby he might end his misery .... unless it were that blunt razor lying on yonder box ..... There was a struggle .... then he thrust the thought from him in very weariness of soul. Why take the trouble to ante-date a process, which Nature would herself perform so soon?

With a groan he turned his face to the wall. The room grew darker and darker .... the fog crept closer and closer .... Exhausted by this conflict of emotion, he sank into a semi-stupor ....

There was a sound of hurried feet upon the stairs. Not the landlady—he knew her heavy, deliberate step, the resounding smack with which her feet hailed each successive landing, but too well. Someone opened the door ....

Who was this? The sordid garret seemed suddenly flooded with light .... Who was this on her knees beside his bed, raining kisses on his wasted hand, murmuring broken words of contrition and pity and love.

"Wilfrid—my husband—forgive me—speak to me. It is I, Gwendolen, who loves you so. Oh! forgive me—forgive me."

"Gwendolen! . . . . Thank God!" he whispered. A great light broke over all his face. He held open his arms. With a low cry of happiness she fell upon his breast.

That was all. There were no reproaches, no explanations, no theological disquisitions any more. In that mute embrace all was forgotten and forgiven. After long grief and pain it seemed so sweet to lie here, lip to lip, heart to heart, oblivious of everything except their mutual love. The hours wore on, the fog crept closer and closer—it had no terrors now—yet still they rested here, babbling their passion with broken words—words too sacred to phrase—coherent only to themselves. Life had something left for them after all!

"And you have come back, really and truly—never to leave me more?" he said at last.

"Never—never," she whispered through her raining tears. "Oh! Wilfrid, the scales have fallen from my eyes at last. I know all. *I know myself.* What was I, that I should abandon you? Who was I, that I should judge you? I, who thought myself the follower of One, who said, '*Judge not!*' I, who, when I deemed myself nearest, was farthest from Him—cold, hard, unforgiving, wrapped in my armour of spiritual pride, false to His teaching, false to you..... pity me, and forgive me. I cannot forgive myself."

For all answer he stroked her bowed head, not trusting himself to speak. The gesture in itself was full and perfect absolution.

"You will not leave me, dear one, never again," he repeated with strained insistence, "never again while life lasts.... It will not be long."

His words struck a chill to her heart. She drew him nearer to her, nearer.

All through the next two days she never left his side, ministering to his needs, anticipating his every wish, bartering even her wedding ring to get him food, fighting hand to hand against the fell disease which was stalking him down, sending up ever from her heart voiceless prayers to the Great White Throne that this cup might pass away. With his consent she wrote to Lord Baltinglass, bidding him come quickly—in the dread presence of the King of Terrors all lesser evils seemed to vanish, all past bitterness to melt away.

But alas! Lord Baltinglass was in Algiers with Miss Tyrconnel, still hugging his wounded self-love and his resentment against his son. When the letter reached him it was too late....

It was towards the evening of the third day. They had been talking of the old happy time at Cambridge and their brief love-dream until Wilfrid's cough came on again and she would let him talk no more. He was resting now, the cold grey day

was slowly dying. Gwendolen had drawn a chair near the window, the better to see in the fading light. She was reading aloud in that soft, low voice of hers, the wondrous twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah:—

'*I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

'*When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest* . . . .'

There was a movement from the still figure on the bed. Suddenly he sprang up with a loud cry:

"Gwendolen—Gwendolen——!"

She ran to him and threw her arms around him, as though she fain would keep him with her through the very strength of her love.

"Wilfrid,—dear one," she wailed. "What is it? speak to me. Look at me,—only one word. Oh! Wilfrid—Wilfrid."

But no answer came. The lips quivered mutely

but could not speak; a wan smile of peaceful trusting broke over the poor thin face; with a tired sigh his head fell upon her breast.

The troubled soul of Wilfrid Tyrconnel had passed through the dark waters—and had at last found peace.

L'ENVOI.

A CHEERLESS day followed a gusty night. There had been a downpour all the morning of driving rain and sleet, but in the afternoon the clouds lifted somewhat and the rain ceased, though no gleam of sunshine pierced the all-pervading greyness. A cutting east wind swept down the Bayswater Road, driving Gwendolen before it, making her draw her shabby cloak more closely around her as she went along. Her slight figure was bowed with grief, her face was white as the pale snowdrops she carried in her hand—a few she had purchased with her spare coppers at a dingy shop

in the Westbourne Grove,—her votive offering to the dead.

What was she doing in the public streets, this widow of a day? Surely at such a time the mourner would tarry, sorrow-stricken in her chamber, striving to hide her grief from every eye. Alas! dire poverty does not give much time for the luxury of woe; it has scant ceremony for mourners' tears. The last sad offices had to be performed and, when one cannot pay other people to do them, one must needs see to them oneself. So Gwendolen had torn herself away from the death chamber, and trudged all the way from Soho to her Bayswater lodging. She had a few trinkets there,—all her most cherished possessions. She was going to pawn them now, so that she might satisfy the lodging-house woman's claims and give her loved one a decent burial. He should not rest in that dreary city of the dead, a London cemetery, surrounded by streets and squares and alleys of gravestones.

No, she would take him down to Cambridge, to the little country churchyard of Grantchester, the church where they had been married,—the place where her dear father lay. There in some quiet corner she would lay him to rest, to sleep until the Resurrection day. He would have wished it thus, rather than in the great, dreary vault at Blarney, with all the pomp of paid woe. And she would lay him to his rest alone. There should be no false friends,—friends who had shunned him in his misfortunes,—to come and shed their crocodile tears around his grave. They would come fast enough now, for they would know that he wanted nothing of them any more. The dead do not borrow, the dead do not need.

So thought Gwendolen as she hurried along, grudging every moment which kept her from the bedside of her dead. "God grant it may not be long before I rejoin him," she prayed. The blankness of desolation lay upon her.

She had reached Hyde Park Terrace, and was crossing the road just by the Marble Arch, when a warning shout from a policeman made her pause mid-way. A carriage dashed past, a neatly appointed Victoria with a smart coachman on the box. It came so near that it splashed her with mud almost from head to foot. Gwendolen looked up indignantly.

There were two people inside, clad in warm furs, wrapped round with a luxurious bear-skin rug. They were so engrossed with one another that they did not see her. The man was talking with animation, the woman was looking up into his face with a happy smile playing around her lips. They were Walpole Coryton and his wife.

It was only an instant, and then the carriage swept through the gates into the park, leaving Gwendolen standing there alone.

A great flood of bitterness poured over her soul. Some chord in her memory vibrated. Back

on her ears there rang in mocking irony the words of the Psalmist:

'*I have been young and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*'

Then she wiped the mud from her face and went on again.

THE END.